

STRANGERS AT THE FARM

To the thunder of the guns on the field of Waterloo, the astonishing career of Napoleon Bonaparte came to an end. In this, one of the decisive battles of the world, the Emperor of the French who had held dominion over all Western Europe, suffered irreparable defeat. Only exile and death remained.

In Belgium, then as so often in history the 'cockpit of Europe', the armies of Britain and France met, offering up to the hope of future peace a sacrifice of men, guns, horses, in a frenzy of action and noise, of agony and heroic death. Here, on the gently rolling cornfields south of Brussels, the men who worshipped '*le petit caporal*' as the epitome of their country's glory, clashed with the stubborn troops of Wellington. Amidst the smoke and flame of gunfire and musketry, driven by the calls of trumpet and bugle and the roll of defiant drums, the antagonists struggled and the scales of victory wavered through ten mortal hours.

Behind the French position, just out of sight of the battlefield at the farm of Le Caillou, there waited in a fever of ever-changing hopes and fears, those members of the Imperial Headquarters whose duties denied them the relief of action. Through their eyes we see the battle's ebb and flow, hear the gossip, the rumours, the wrangling, recall the past glories, hear the views of the generals, realize the devotion of the Emperor's servants. Into the once peaceful, homely farmhouse erupt the horrors of war, for just two days, leaving behind ruin and death: into the life of the little maid-servant who saw it all comes one of the greatest men of history, the modern Caesar, leaving for her memories of outward might and hidden depths of love.

By the same author

**LITTLE CREOLE
THE LOSING FIGHT**

Strangers at the Farm

Le Caillou, 17th-18th June 1815

BY

ROSAMUND M. CHAMBERS



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‘By God, I don’t think it would have done if I had not been there.’

Wellington to Mr. Creevey, about noon 19th June 1815

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Foreword

THIS is the story of the Battle of Waterloo as seen through the eyes of those Frenchmen who spent that day at the Imperial Headquarters, the farm of Le Caillou, about a mile and a half behind the Emperor's forward position at the inn of La Belle Alliance. The story is divided by two interludes from the English point of view.

A legend, still current in the villages near the battle-field, that, somewhere there, Napoleon's posterity survives, is interwoven with the foundation of fact. The only woman present at Le Caillou during the night and day of 17th-18th June 1815, was the young maid-servant, Marie Houzeau.

She was still alive, living at Vieux-Manant, across the road from Le Caillou, in 1883. The young sons of the then owner of the farm, become a country villa, heard from her details of the Emperor's breakfast party on the morning of 18th June 1815, and of how she went with a servant to the cellar to look for wine and across to a neighbouring farm for meat for the Emperor's dinner.

The date of her death is unknown, but she must certainly have been amongst the last surviving witnesses of the day of Waterloo.

With regard to the historical authorities used, I refer my readers to a note at the end of this book.

Here, I wish only to make a few points.

First: the messengers to and from Marshal Grouchy, their number, their names when known, and the times of arrival and departure are factual. So are some of the other callers, but not all. But all are possible and many may be deduced from the necessary fetchings of horses, food, etc., which certainly took place.

Secondly, the times indicated for the principal phases of

the battle are as correct as the most reliable historians can make them. In particular, I would stress the exactness of the crucial moment—half past six in the evening—when La Haye Sainte was captured.

Thirdly, the incident of the traitor officer is true. Fortunately, his name is not known.

Lastly, Fleury de Chaboulon did drive back towards the battlefield and narrowly escaped lynching by infuriated French soldiers, who took him for a Royalist deserting to the English.

For the first time since Cromwell's victory at Dunbar in 1650, a medal was issued to every man present in the English army on the day of Waterloo, a medal 'still most highly treasured in the highest and the humblest of English homes', as Fortescue, the historian of the British army, remarks. Ensign Frederick Dashwood Swann's medal is in the possession of his great-grandson, my friend, Peter Dashwood Swann.

I write always of the 'English' army, which may appear unfair to the allied contingents present in the line that day. This is partly for convenience and partly of set purpose. For the French nation, the eternal, unwavering enemy was England. For the French army, particularly those men, whether officers or private soldiers, who had fought in Spain, the troops most to be respected and feared were the red-coated infantry of 'Villainton'.

The only named 'imaginary' character is my staunch friend 'George the sergeant' whom I have moved backwards in time from World War I to the Waterloo campaign. All the others named were present at Le Caillou or on the battlefield during the period from 17th-18th June 1815.

PART 1

Out of a clear sky

‘What would I not give for the power of Joshua today. . . .’

Napoleon, on the threshold of Le Caillou on the evening of 17th June.

LD Madame Boucquéau was upstairs at her favourite pastime of rearranging the linen cupboard. Occasionally she would call 'Angélique, chérie', and her daughter-in-law would come from admiring herself in her new dress, to exclaim with pleasure at the fine lace-edged frill of a pillow-slip or commiserate over a good sheet getting thin in the middle. Behind her, clasping her doll, pattered Sylvie, four years old, showing a grave interest in the proceedings.

Madame Boucquéau was, above everything, houseproud. There was no end to the polishing of the carved cherrywood chairs (of the period of Louis XVI), of the oak cupboards and chests and tables and, with great reverence, the tall crucifix. The family ate off earthenware, but with silver table appointments. A handsome Tournay carpet of black and green covered the dining-room floor. In the kitchen copper pots and pans gleamed. There, too, was a fine solid oak table and oak chairs. Madame employed only good and reliable servants, and treated them well.

If Madame was proud and particular in her care of the house, Monsieur had equal pride in the farm. The barn, high as both storeys of the house, was large and always well filled with grain and hay; there were half a dozen horses, twenty or more cows, pigs, sheep, and a couple of hundred chickens.

A high white wall, running parallel to and beside the Brussels-Charleroi turnpike road, enclosed a large apple orchard. Beyond a gate leading from the yard into the fields, Monsieur owned more than seventy acres of good arable land and rented thirty more. The property was a prosperous one; a valuation of one hundred thousand francs might be placed upon it, and old Monsieur, though now

seventy-eight years old, was still strong and active and, on the whole, content. His only disquiet was that his son Géry was an odd fellow, preferring to write poetry and dress in his best clothes to visit literary friends in Brussels, rather than help his father in the management of the farm. That had not mattered much when he was a youngster, but now, at thirty-seven, married and with a child to think of, it was a nonsensical and thriftless way to behave. Géry's wife, too, acted above her station. Spoilt, conceited, extravagant, she fell into fashionable hysterics, which she called 'my attacks' if crossed in any concern affecting herself.

Yet, these matters might mend in time and on this fine June day with the prospect of a good and early harvest Monsieur ought to have been perfectly happy. Only that morning, early, surveying his house with its white walls and pleasant rose-coloured tiled roof, standing apart from its humbler one-storey neighbours, set in its frame of varying greenery, Monsieur had thought that it was as pleasant a home as man could desire.

But, at heart, he was uneasy. He did not show it for fear of upsetting his womenfolk, but the news brought by travellers from Charleroi, three days ago, was that the French frontier was closed and no mail or travellers were being allowed through. During last night, all his farm-hands and house-servants had disappeared. All but that little Marie, rising sixteen, so willing, so pretty and with such gentle, engaging manners. Her mother, who had been in the best service in Brussels, had brought her up well. She was gaining experience and being useful to Madame Boucquéau who, in her husband's eyes, was the perfect house manager and home-maker.

Now, at a little past midday, Monsieur was attending to a sick calf, and had obliged Géry to help him in what Géry considered a degrading and disgusting business.

Marie, scrubbing the kitchen floor, sat back on her heels, pushing the long locks of hair from her hot face, listened, amused, to the two men, disputing in the cowshed. It was fun that M. Géry had to help with that calf. His surly

voice was complaining and old Monsieur growled in reply, as so often, that the farm provided Géry with his livelihood and that all that poetry writing was a nonsensical fad.

Lately, and for the first time in her life, Marie had experienced excitement. For two months now there had been hundreds of soldiers billeted on all the surrounding villages, spending their time marching about, drilling, firing off muskets and cannon in practice, training their cavalry horses in complicated movements. They were pleasant men; stolid, plain, with noticeably bad teeth. You couldn't understand a word they said, but they would draw water, help in the kitchen and play endlessly with the children. Everyone spoke well of them. They paid on the spot for anything they wanted, eggs, butter, a chicken, and hardly ever misbehaved or got badly drunk. When they did, they got such punishment, poor things, that they never transgressed again.

There were Tommies and Paddies and Taffies and Jocks. They were all nice to do with, but nicest of all were the Jocks, men from the mountains with bare knees and gaily patterned skirts. People with Jocks billeted on them would boast of it as of a special favour. The children loved them, shouted at sight of them, 'Hallo! Redhead!' but they only answered readily to the general name of 'Jock'.

All these good-natured men seemed settled here for ever, but suddenly, early yesterday morning, great numbers of them had gone past the house, marching away from Brussels by the turnpike, towards Genappe and Charleroi. In the hot, bright morning, they had stepped out briskly to gay music: Tommies, Taffies, Paddies, mostly in red coats as was to be expected, but ahead went ranks of lithe light-stepping men in dark green. Tommies as well, she believed, but they made an odd contrast. There were hundreds of Jocks too, very smart, their skirts swinging at every jaunty step, their high black bonnets with the tightly curled feather ornament set at saucy angles, the checkered stockings of red and white, tied with bunched red ribbons making them a splendid sight. They marched to the sound of those screeching pipes which seemed to be their idea of music.

And, at almost eight o'clock, escorted by a crowd of officers in dark blue or brilliant scarlet and gold braid, the Duke himself had ridden past. He was very plainly dressed in a dark blue coat, and white breeches and a low-crowned bicorne hat. As his cavalcade approached, the ranks of marching men parted at a word of command to make way, and the soldiers cheered in their English way, 'Hurrah! Hurrah!' adding some odd noise that sounded like 'Ole Nauzé!'

M. Géry, who had hustled the family and Marie to the front door to see the Duke, said it was because of his big nose. It certainly was big and high—like a bird's beak. But when he touched his hat in salute at the cheers and at the women curtseying, there had been a little smile on his stern face.

M. Géry was very great on 'the Duke'; talked about him as though he were an intimate friend. Every time he went into Brussels he would come back with news of him. He had seen him walking in the Park, or reviewing troops in the Allée Verte, or driving about with his *belle amie*—some Englishwoman who had come over to keep him company. At all this talk, old Monsieur would smile sarcastically and shrug. He wasn't so keen on the English and their Duke, and regarded him merely as the representative of the new king planted on Belgium by those people in Vienna. A Hollander indeed! Monsieur Boucquéau had no use for that Hollander, talking a language worse than Flemish—and moreover, a Protestant. Belgium had flourished more than ever before during the last twenty years as a part of France. 'They treated us as no better than second-class citizens,' M. Géry would retort. Then an argument would begin. . . .

Soon after the Jocks and the English had passed, there had come men with blackened faces, wearing black uniforms, and a troop of horsemen with fur caps, a white badge like a skull for ornament. A tall young man, very proud and stern, with gold braided cloak and saddle-cloth, led them. And after them, more foot soldiers, looking rather like their own Belgian soldiers in their blue coats.

Meanwhile, there had been the distant rumble and thud of what M. Géry said was gunfire, from the south. There was a big battle going on, one of the neighbours had said. He had set out to go to Frasnes on business but had had to turn back at Genappe. 'The Prussians and the French are fighting somewhere near Sombreffe and our people and the French are at it at the Quatre Bras crossroads.'

Young Madame had promptly had one of her 'attacks', screaming that they would all be murdered in their beds if the French came.

It took all M. Géry's patient explanations to calm her. All those soldiers had gone south in order to beat the French and drive them back to France. With the Duke there, no harm could come to them. Besides, Brussels was only twelve miles away and the Duke would never let the French get as far as Brussels—or anywhere near it.

He sounded so certain, that Marie, too, had felt quite happy to go to bed guarded by the Duke and his Tommies and Jocks.

This morning all had been quiet, so perhaps the French were beaten and the war over. . . .

Marie, her scrubbing now finished, wiped the sweat from her face with the corner of her apron and again pushed the hair from her face. She ought to put it up, but people admired it so—its chestnut colour, its long curls—that she was vain of it and liked to display it.

The day had turned sultry. There must be thunder about. She went to the back door for a breath of air, and old Monsieur and M. Géry having disappeared, ran swiftly across the courtyard and into the orchard. There, she could get a bit of peace and pretend she had been looking for eggs if old Madame scolded her for not getting on with the polishing.

Within the orchard wall the ground rose slightly, so that at the farthest corner one could lean one's elbows on the wall and see over the top. The sky had darkened to leaden grey, the leaves hung limp and motionless, no bird sang.

From her vantage point Marie could see straight ahead the cluster of houses of Maison-du-Roi where the Planchenoit side-road joined the white and dusty pike. Beyond Maison-du-Roi a sharp corner hid the road as it dipped slightly. It reappeared beyond the red roof of the inn of La Belle Alliance, then dropped more sharply, was hidden again and rose, a gradual slope, passed the farm of La Haye Sainte and was lost, three or more miles away in the dark mass on the horizon which was the Forest of Soignes. Brussels, which was home to Marie, lay somewhere beyond the forest. All about her, the undulating dips and ridges were thick with rye nearly ready for harvesting. Here and there a patch of fallow splashed the green with a rich brown. People said that the hollows and the hillocks reminded them of the waves of the sea.

Marie wondered if she would ever see the sea itself. . . .

To the right, over Chantelet wood, she could just see the tip of the spire of Planchenoit church, to the left, faintly far, the village of Braine l'Alleud and, farther to the left, by leaning over the wall, the wood and the high-walled orchard of the big house of Hougoumont. Behind the house, the Nivelles road ran converging till at last it joined the pike at the village of Mont Saint-Jean, invisible from Marie's post in the orchard, but somewhere between La Haye Sainte and the forest.

The scene was very familiar, very peaceful and, now that the soldiers had gone—very dull. Just an ordinary summer's day. Still, it was nice to be in the open air. Someone would start calling for her soon and she would have to go indoors to her work. . . .

Then, as from a distance, came the sound of marching feet.

Marie stared intently, but the road from Brussels was bare of life. Had soldiers passed into the dip between La Haye Sainte and La Belle Alliance and she not noticed them? The marching feet came nearer, were close at hand, and then she saw soldiers, close beside her, marching *towards* Brussels.

She gasped. The English troops were coming back the

way they had gone yesterday, the limber young men in dark green and black, the Redcoats, and the Jocks. Today, dirty, unshaven, some with torn uniforms, some with bandaged arms or bandaged heads, shakos at all angles, muskets slung, bent a little under their heavy packs, they marched doggedly, but looking deathly tired.

She watched, fascinated and alarmed. They couldn't have *lost* the battle—not with the Duke there (she was getting just like M. Géry in her confidence in the Duke).

At their head rode the General in the worn frock-coat and tall beaver hat who had led them yesterday, riding very erect. Today, though still erect, his face was grey and drawn. The two young officers riding a pace or two behind (yesterday there had been three) looked grim.

The English went by in silence, the Jocks too, except for one regiment whose massed pipes were wailing as they escorted a stretcher covered by a cloak with a sword and the feathered bonnet of the regiment laid upon it.

Behind them, the black Germans stepped out stiffly. They too, escorted a stretcher. The black cloak upon it, embroidered in gold, covered a tall man, whose booted feet protruded. Behind, the Death's Head horsemen gathered close as if to protect the dead more surely.

Suddenly the air was shattered by a burst of musket fire followed by a tinkle of broken glass. Marie ducked behind the wall, crouched there, trembling. These men—supposed to be their protectors against the French—were firing on the house. . . .

The noise of feet and horsehoofs died away and she peeped over the wall again. The head of the column was already mounting the farther slope towards the forest. What *was* going to happen? M. Géry had been so sure. . . .

Watching the troops she had not noticed the grey sky deepen to black. Suddenly with a streak of vivid lightning and a shattering peal of thunder, the downpour burst, blotting out the landscape. Marie stumbled towards the house through a wall of water. In the three minutes of running she was soaked, her hair streaming, her stout

cotton bodice clinging to her breasts. In the kitchen doorway, young Madame greeted her in fury, would hardly let her in out of the rain. Where had she been? What doing? She must hurry and come—at once—at once—they were all going.

‘Going—where to, madame?’

‘What’s that to you? Hurry, stupid girl.’

‘But—I don’t understand.’

‘Stupid—stupid! The English are beaten—the French are coming—I said how it would be—murdered—all murdered—my little Sylvie—not staying here—an instant.’ Her voice was rising to hysteria.

Old Monsieur appeared behind her. ‘Quiet, Angélique, quiet. All will be well. Marie, get your cloak and come. We are going to Planchenoit to my brother. It will be better—for young Madame and Sylvie.’

His daughter-in-law stormed afresh. ‘Didn’t you hear those shots? Those Brunswickers fired at our windows as they went by—at *my* window—I was doing my hair—I might have been killed—only a beginning—the French will be much worse.’

‘The cart is ready; hurry, Marie.’ M. Géry, his coat buttoned close, an old hat crammed over his ears, called from the yard. There the covered cart was waiting, the horses’ heads bowed under the lashing rain.

And then swift decision came. ‘I would rather stay here.’

‘Stupid—stupid—selfish’, young Madame was raging. ‘Keeping us waiting—murdered—my child, my little Sylvie.’

Old Monsieur was patient, waved her into silence. ‘You can’t stay here alone, Marie. Think of what may happen to you.’

‘Thank you, monsieur, but I’m not afraid of the French.’

Young Madame laughed hysterically. ‘Leave her, leave her—our brave little Marie—not afraid of the French! I’m not prepared to wait here to die while we persuade Marie.’

Monsieur said, ‘Be reasonable, Marie.’

And M. Géry called again, 'Come along, all of you. Maman is getting anxious and Sylvie is crying.'

Young Madame, pushing Marie roughly aside, rushed through the rain and climbed in under the tilt. Her wild sobbing came to them.

'You see, Marie,' old Monsieur was still patient. 'You are hindering us all. Get your cloak and come.'

She said, stubborn now, though her legs were trembling, 'I'm not coming, thank you, monsieur. Please go. I shall be all right.'

He argued with her, reluctant to leave her. She became the more determined.

At last he said, 'Very well then, but keep all the doors bolted and all the shutters shut. I want no strangers in my farm.'

He left her, looking back, shaking his head sadly, and got into the cart. M. Géry climbed up and shook the reins. The cart moved slowly, the wheels squelching through the thick mud of the farmyard, passed through the field gate, turned right into a cart track, and jolting, heaving, swaying under the downpour was gone. . . .

Marie, shivering in her wet clothes, shut and bolted the courtyard door and slowly went upstairs. The rooms were darkened by the closed shutters. She cautiously opened one a few inches; the glass was smashed, the storm tore it from her hands, and the rain swept into the room. She snatched the shutter to again. Outside there was merely a wall of water, the road was a river of mud, trees nearby tossed and bent in the fierce wind. She had never seen such a storm.

She wondered why she had refused to go with them. Just to spite young Madame? To pretend that she was not afraid—when she was? Or because—and she took a deep breath—because she was wildly excited? Something was really going to *happen* in her life at last. . . .

She went to the small closet where her bed was, pulled out her box and found dry clothes.

The shutter, carelessly latched, flew open and clashed to

again, and she jumped with fright. Goodness, this *was* stupid! To be frightened by a rattling shutter! She latched it again with precision, and, sitting down on the bed, tried to decide whether to stay or go. The nearest farms at Maison-du-Roi and Vieux-Manant were ruled out. The owners had probably fled like her own employers. But there was Chantelet, not more than twenty minutes away through the wood, and the people there were friendly. But, how silly to run away after her display of independence.

Amidst the swish of the rain, she distinguished horsehoofs. Cautiously opening the shutter a crack, she saw ranks of cavalry passing. Wrapped to the ears in their dark cloaks, crouched over their horses' necks, riding as fast as may be through the wall of water, they passed northwards towards Brussels. Horsemen and horses were muddied to the knee. The horses slithered at every step, throwing up fountains of dirty water. The men's uniforms were hidden by the all-enveloping cloaks. No cavalry had passed yesterday riding from Brussels. Could there be French soldiers—here—already?

Then one of them glanced up and must have seen her, for he shouted something unintelligible—in English—or German. She would have understood a Frenchman well enough.

She closed the shutter and stood trembling. What a fool she had been to stay. She must run to Chantelet. Taking her old cloak from the hook beside her bed, she put it on and yet remained irresolute. There were horses walking gently on the road now. She peeped out again. A regiment in tarnished helmets, with draggled horse-hair tails, were going by with an exaggerated insolent slowness. We'll not be hurried, they seemed to say. They carried short muskets and on their helmets was the number twenty-three. Their calm, their assurance, steadied her. She would stay. . . .

Suddenly, at a word of command, the ranks opened and a tight-knit cavalcade rode through. In the instant of passing she recognized the high hawk nose, the low-crowned hat—

the Duke! Her resolution hardened. She *would* stay. . . .

Presently she realized she was empty with hunger. The kitchen fire was out, but there were the remains of cold beef from *déjeuner*, cheese, bread and beer.

The hall clock struck five. What an odd thing. . . ! They had had *déjeuner* at noon, and she had washed up, scrubbed the kitchen floor, gone out to the orchard, the rain had begun, the family had departed and so on, and so on, and she had never thought about the time at all.

She carried hunks of bread, cheese and beef and a mug of beer up to her closet. Somehow she felt safer upstairs. She ate and drank and felt better. The only sounds were the rain beating on the road, the thunder rolling away into the distance and the rattling shutters.

A helter-skelter of clattering wheels and horsehoofs brought her to the window again. Horsemen with long lances, horse-drawn guns with men in black greatcoats, and officers wrapped in cloaks, lurched past in a flurry of churned-up mud. Then someone shouted an order, immediately under the window. . . .

She recognized it as French. A small stout man in a sodden grey coat and a black bicorne hanging limp over his ears, humped over the neck of his grey horse, galloped after the guns.

Behind him came more horsemen, in green with fur caps, their plumes bedraggled, their clothes sodden. They were spurring crazily forward, there horses rearing, slipping, here and there falling, their riders, thrown and left unregarded by their comrades to struggle up and limp after the squadron. The little man pointed with his riding whip towards Brussels, shouted again and the troop had swept out of sight in a few moments.

Under the window, other horsemen were reining up. A loud voice spoke sharply, the blows of some massive object—once—twice—thrice—and the front door gave way with a crash of splintering wood. Heavy footsteps invaded the house.

Marie tiptoed to the stairhead.

A commanding voice said, 'I think this will do. See what's above, sergeant.'

The girl ran to her closet, pulled the curtain in front of the bed, sat trembling. She heard stumping feet on the stairs and a man throwing open the bedroom doors, counting, 'One—Two—Three—Four.' He seemed about to go away, but turning, stamped on her foot and she screamed. The curtain ripped down under his hand.

'Sacred Name!' he said, and in that instant seized her arm. 'What the devil are *you* doing here?'

She managed, 'I belong here.'

His grip was firm, but not painful. 'You had better come along to my officer,' he said, and they bundled down the stairs together, through the everyday parlour, into the best parlour.

There, an officer was pacing out the floor, his back to them. He threw over his shoulder the remark, 'That'll do for the duty room, and this—six yards by five yards . . .' turned about, 'Name of a Name! What *have* you got there?'

'A girl, mon capitaine, hiding upstairs.'

The cross-examination began: her name; Marie Houzeau; a servant here; the family gone to Planchenoit.

'And why did you not go too?' The officer, frowning, was standing over her.

She murmured, 'I didn't want to go.' It sounded stupid now.

'Weren't you afraid?'

'Yes—n-no, monsieur.'

'Hein? Which, yes or no?'

'I don't know, monsieur.'

'Well, as you're here *you* can make yourself useful in the kitchen, but mind, *mind* if you go a yard beyond the door or out of the yard without an escort—*you—will—be—shot.*'

It sounded awful, but his eyes were twinkling above his firm mouth.

She felt it was time to drop a curtsey. 'Thank you, monsieur.'

He said sharply, 'Sergeant, post your sentries. This must do for headquarters for tonight. Tell them to keep an eye on this girl.' And to Marie, 'Get along.' She backed away.

Already the hall was crowded with men carrying portmanteaux and valises, who pushed past her, ignoring her, acting as though they knew their duty exactly.

At the front door were several dark green carriages, two waggons, an elegant post-chaise, painted yellow with red wheels. All these vehicles were plastered with mud as after a long journey.

Servants were unloading the waggons, bringing in stewpans and dishes, great baskets piled with provisions and loaves of bread.

From a carriage, two imposing gentlemen in greatcoats emerged slowly.

'This servant-girl here is to help you,' the sergeant said. 'And keep an eye on her.'

The gentlemen hung up their coats in the hall cupboard as cool as you please. Again she must 'come along'.

Said the shorter, stouter man, pompously. 'This is M. Chandelier, the Emperor's chef.'

And said M. Chandelier, 'This is M. Pierron, the Emperor's Maître d'Hôtel.' (Whatever was that?)

M. Pierron straightened the collar of his neat black coat, examined the cuffs attentively.

She stared, open-mouthed. 'The—Emperor . . . ?'

'Will sleep here tonight on this way to Brussels. Tomorrow we shall be at the Palace of Laeken in Brussels,' M. Pierron assured her.

From a small valise, M. Chandelier produced a white apron and chef's cap and arrayed himself. 'Get the fire going,' he said to one of his kitchen boys, and to Marie, 'Show him the wood-shed.' To another servant he ordered, 'See whether there is any beer.'

Marie, the boy and the man, returning, the two with fire-wood, the third reporting about forty casks of beer in an out-house, Chandelier deigned to be pleased. 'We shall need all of those,' and he ordered a cask to be rolled in immediately.

Already he had opened a cupboard and after inspecting Madame Boucquéau's kitchen utensils, was pushing them aside to make room for the pans the servants had carried in.

The remarks of other gentlemen arriving were audible from the hall.

A prim voice said, 'This seems not too bad, considering.'

A severe voice, 'I've known much worse.'

And a gay young voice: 'You're easy to please. I call it a wretched hovel.'

The severe voice replied: 'You're new to campaigning, Fleury.'

The prim voice: 'I wonder what rooms are upstairs. One must stake out a claim, if one is to have a bed tonight.'

Fleury volunteered to go and see. He ran upstairs, tramped along the corridor and ran down again. 'Four rooms, four beds, two doubles . . . but I say, do you see, in the kitchen there's a *girl*. Four beds—no, five—if you count . . .'

'Chut!' said the prim voice.

'And only *one* girl,' the young man said and added resignedly, 'Well, no bed for me—and no girl, I suppose. You, M. de Bassano, and Bertrand and Soult. . . .'

'General Bertrand and the Maréchal Duc de Dalmatie to you, young man,' said the severe voice.

'And the fourth for you, M. le Baron Fain.' Fleury sounded unabashed. 'There's a huge barn alongside the house; I shall explore the possibilities of that. I don't mind a night in the hay—at least, not much.'

He went away, and the prim voice of the Duc de Bassano said, 'Fleury carries his jokes too far—but one can't help liking him,' and then, 'What about our baggage?'

Marie helping, the kitchen fire was soon burning brightly. Through the open door, she could see these grand people who were preparing to sleep in her master's beds without a by-your-leave.

The Duc de Bassano was short and stout, with pursed lips and smooth, white hair. He was neatly dressed, and his dark blue tail-coat was heavily braided with silver lace. M. le

Baron Fain was tall, dark, with thin cheeks and tousled hair and less silver lace. Standing humbly behind them was a pale, nondescript young man with sandy hair and eyebrows, dressed plainly in dark green. He hugged a large green leather case. He was as inanimate as a piece of furniture and as little regarded.

M. Fleury's voice had pleased her most. She was curious to see him.

At the front door, a rough authoritative voice shouted suddenly, 'Way, gentlemen please, way for the Emperor's baggage.'

'And way for the Emperor's baggage-master! Vive le Capitaine Coignet!' Fleury had come back from inspecting the barn. Marie, peeping, decided he looked rather nice.

'What about *our* baggage?' said Bassano again plaintively.

'All other unloading will be in the yard, monseigneur. We can't have carriages standing in the road. Troops coming up.' To servants bringing valises, leather cases, and long metal containers he directed, 'Second room, the Emperor's bedroom.'

The best parlour! What would old Madame say?

Fleury said, 'The barn'll do. Dr. Larrey is setting up his ambulance station there. His minions are laying out all sorts of knives and pans and whatnots, but they won't start cutting off arms and legs till tomorrow, I suppose.' He sauntered into the everyday parlour. 'Is *this* the best they can do for a duty room? We'll be sitting on the floor. I'll get some carriage cushions. Nobody seems to bother about *us*.'

'Why should they?' said Fain. 'On campaign, everyone fends for himself.'

'Except the High Officers of State,' said Bassano.

'Well, I'm going fending for some carriage cushions. Oh, all the carriages are *gone*!'

'Into the back yard, on Coignet's orders,' said Fain.

'How that man does bully us!'

Fleury came into the kitchen, caught Marie's eye and smiled. He looked very engaging and she was pleased when,

passing her, he said in a low voice, 'I'll be seeing you again, my dear,' as he went through into the yard.

Chandelier called after him. 'M. Fleury, see if the waggon with the Emperor's plate has come. If not, I shall have to serve His Majesty's dinner in this earthenware,' he added to Pierron.

Fleury called back, 'Not a hope of the plate. We passed it, stuck on the road in Genappe.'

'Where's that man Coignet?' Chandelier hustled to the front door calling for the baggage-master and the plate waggon.

Coignet, shouting, directing, cursing coachmen and waggon-drivers, answered Chandelier. 'You shall have the plate, M. Chandelier. I'll send a picket to look for it. You shall have it.'

Fleury reappeared, unperturbed, his arms full of cushions. 'We shall settle in nicely. Have you seen your back-yard lately, missy?'

'Goodness!' The yard was filling up with carriages and waggons ranging themselves in orderly ranks, their horses being unharnessed and led away. One waggon had a close guard about it. 'The Imperial treasure, my dear, millions of gold napoleons and goodness knows what else—and don't you go near it.'

'And the horses?'

'They'll go into the cowsheds—they'll chase the cows off into the fields.'

'All my master's cows! Whatever will he say?' And then 'Ooh—*look*!'

There, under the pelting rain was Madame's carved cupboard, the oak chest, the china cabinet. 'They'll be spoilt—quite spoilt.'

'Can't help that, my dear. They had to make room for the Emperor's fal-lals. He's no respecter of other people's possessions where his own convenience is concerned.'

'But they can't do *that*—really they can't,' she wailed.

'Don't cry, it's not your fault and I'll say this for the Emperor, he always pays for any damage if he is asked to.'

‘And all those soldiers!’ she gasped, pointing.

‘Preparing to bivouac,’ Fleury commented casually.

There were hundreds, in dark blue greatcoats and tall fur caps, piling arms and knapsacks in the orchard. Seemingly indifferent to the rain, their clothes already sodden and plastered with mud, they were calmly settling down in the open. Two were drawing water from the well. A third, a huge man, had found old Monsieur’s axe in a shed and was hacking branches from an apple tree. A comrade pointed at the parlour furniture. Others came, looked, said, ‘This’ll do—dry wood,’ and dragged the cupboard and the chest away. The huge man reduced them to firewood with a few tremendous strokes.

‘The old campaigners,’ said Fleury quite unmoved. ‘You’ve got the élite of the army guarding you, the first battalion of the 1st Chasseurs à pied of the Old Guard. They’ve got their parade uniforms for the triumphal entry into Brussels in those knapsacks. Such a sight as they will be . . . white breeches, white stockings, white crossbelts and buckled shoes! Trousers and dun-coloured crossbelts are merely campaign dress.’

It was all quite beyond her. She stood bewildered and unhappy. Madame’s handsome furniture broken up for firewood!

‘And look there!’ she exclaimed.

Already one of the kitchen boys was plucking freshly killed chickens as fast as he could. He had at least a dozen of her master’s chickens dead around him!

The chef called for her imperiously to come and scour large pots and pans which her mistress rarely used.

Fleury went into the front of the house with the cushions. She heard him gaily greeting new arrivals. . . .

However many more, she asked, and what did they all do? Chandelier was pleased to display his knowledge of these matters. ‘You’ll notice men in sky blue uniforms with silver braid and hats with white plumes, they’re the Emperor’s aides-de-camp. The orderlies—they wear *dark blue*—they simply ride about with messages. His Majesty generally has

eight aides and about a dozen orderlies on campaign. Also four or five esquires. General Fouler is their chief. They are in charge of the staff's horses and make sure there are always enough of them ready groomed for immediate use day or night. For the Emperor himself they have a string of his favourite Arabs. Two or three of the best are always kept saddled. Then there are pages, very young men—one or two always attend the Emperor. . . .'

'What a lot of waiting on the Emperor needs.'

'Well, it needn't trouble *you*, my girl, you just do what *I* tell you.'

'Are we going to *feed* all those people?'

'Most of them must make do with bread and cheese—and beer. I'm glad your master has a good stock of *that*. They'll *all* be thirsty.'

'And you're doing all this . . .' she hesitated to add 'upsetting', 'just for one night?'

'Just so. We're always on the move when the Emperor is on campaign. Wednesday we were at Beaumont, Thursday at Charleroi, yesterday at Fleurus—and now here—what's this farm called?'

'Le Caillou.'

'You'll remember this night, girl. Tomorrow we shall be at the Palace of Lacken in Brussels. Just like old times that will be. The kitchens there are splendid.'

'Shall I see the Emperor? I saw him once when I was a little girl.' (Why did he smile?—she *was* a little girl five years ago.) 'He came to Brussels with the Empress and my mother took me out to see them. We cheered a lot—but mother said mostly for the Empress—she was Austrian, you see, and mother said we had for a long time belonged to Austria and most people had liked that. But it was quite a long time ago, my mother said—more than twenty years, I think.'

'You may see him again tonight—if you're good and help me nicely.'

'When will he come?'

'Nobody knows.'

'Is he a long way behind?'

'Behind! He must have passed here two hours ago, with Jacquinot's Hussars and Lancers and some horse artillery. We had to wait for them to pass us on the road. Coignet held us up till he was through.'

'That M. Coignet seems to be a very important man.'

Chandelier grimaced. 'Most important—in his own eyes—except when the Emperor's about. Then he makes himself very small and humble. But he knows his duty and what he says goes. Oh, Captain Coignet's a rare one—a real Old Moustache.'

Whatever was that? she asked.

'A Grenadier of the Old Guard.'

'The tale goes' (Pierron had come in) 'that in order to be tall enough for the Grenadiers his colonel advised him to put a pack of cards inside the feet of his stockings. That made him five feet six inches tall.'

'One pack wasn't enough, he put *two*,' said Pierron.

'Since then he has been through every campaign—Austria, Prussia, Poland, Russia. . . .'

'Since the Russian campaign he has been baggage-master. He can tell amusing stories by the hour when he's in a good humour.'

They retold the stories with relish, but Marie, bewildered, not amused by the jokes, remarked timidly that he sounded very frightening. She hoped she need never have to speak to him.

'His bark is worse than his bite,' said Chandelier, and having prepared a sauce of fresh tomatoes with great care, he set Marie to stirring it. Then he removed a chicken from the spit, put another on and ordered a boy to keep his eye on it.

Marie asked would the Emperor eat two *whole* chickens?

'Must have one done to a turn when he comes in. Once they cooked twenty-three in an evening—before my time, that was. He didn't dine till eleven. . . . ' More reminiscing.

'I wish that plate waggon would come' said Pierron. 'There is wine in it—the Emperor *must* have wine. Where's

your master's cellar, missy? I must see what he has in store—just in case we need it.'

She said Monsieur only offered wine on special occasions, but, showing him the trap-door to the cellar, went ahead to light the steps with a candle. They found four bottles of what Pierron deigned to call 'passable Burgundy' and brought two up with them.

'And I must have tall candlesticks—silver candlesticks.' There were none, but she would fetch the bedroom holders for him.

'No silver ones *at all*?' What a house! he seemed to say.

The hall was full of young men in the sky blue and silver of aides-de-camp, the dark blue of orderlies. The floor was strewn with opened valises, sodden cloaks, filthy boots, hats with draggled once-white plumes. The newel posts of the banisters were festooned with sword-belts, the swords swinging, clanking, clattering to the floor as the crowd surged up and down the stairs. Youngsters, the pages, rushed about, apparently aimlessly, getting in everyone's way. The house rang with their laughter, the shouted comments on 'pigging it here', and the cheerful retorts of, 'What does it matter? *Tomorrow* we shall be in Brussels.'

Pig it, indeed! Marie, passing upstairs, glared at them, very dignified. It made no manner of difference. They all ogled her, some even dared to nudge her. What an ill-bred lot!

She returned to the kitchen, head held high, followed by murmurs of, 'A *girl* here!'

An older voice reproved them. 'None of that nonsense! Remember we've a big day tomorrow.'

Again the young voices, in chorus, 'A short ride into Brussels—twelve miles. . . .' Fresh reprimands.

Pierron had produced tall wax candles from his own valise and regarded the tin holders from the bedrooms with disgust.

'Never have I been without *silver* holders before,' he said. Marie went back to stirring the sauce, with passionate care. She felt really caught up into the importance of this Imperial dinner.

An aide-de-camp put his head round the door. 'His Majesty is just leaving the forward posts. He'll be here shortly and the fire in his bedroom has gone out. Archambault can't do anything with it, can that girl come. . . ?'

'Go along, my dear.'

She went with the aide, who said anxiously, 'Be as quick as you can, missy, the Emperor will come in soaked.'

She gaped at the transformation of the best parlour. A narrow bed, draped with green curtains, fringed with gold, stood against the wall nearest the fire, and a washing-stand with silver basin and ewer in a corner. A folding chair with leather seat and back stood by the hearth. Leather portmanteaux and cloth valises were stacked near the window. On the table was a handsome green leather case with a gold N on the lid and elaborate gold locks. Six candles were clustered on the narrow mantelpiece. (Six! Alight in *one* room!) All that remained of Madame's cherished furniture was the crucifix and two of the delicately carved upright chairs.

A kitchen boy brought in an armful of fire-wood—bits of the cupboard!

Outside in the damp and foggy gloom of evening, the road was peopled with marching shadows, the air full of the noise of creaking wheels, jingling harness, horsehoofs and harsh commanding voices.

Marie worked the bellows feverishly, and the thin flame spurted, died, spurted again. There came the sound of distant cheering. The aide-de-camp standing over her, anxiously, said, 'Hurry!' The orderlies in the duty room were chattering gaily. The cheering grew louder, was near, was at the window.

'Vive l'Empereur!' A great shout!

Then, at a clatter of hoofs, silence fell suddenly in the duty room and in the passage. It seemed as though the whole house was holding its breath.

A deep, husky voice broke the stillness, exclaiming, 'What would I not give today to have the power of Joshua to delay nightfall by two hours,' and footsteps resounded in the hall. The aide-de-camp was standing to attention.

Panic seized her. Should she run away? Get up and curtsey? Go on working the bellows? The Emperor was in the room before she could decide. With him came a tall man in a greatcoat, a man in a turban and cloak with baggy trousers, fastened tightly at the ankles, and a young boy. All were equally bedraggled.

‘Where’s Marchand?’ the Emperor demanded, and flung down his riding crop and sodden black hat which cascaded water over the table. A young man, exquisite in a scarlet coat braided in silver, appeared behind the group, explained that Marchand had not yet arrived—nobody could understand the delay—hoped not an accident—Captain Coignet had sent . . .

He grunted, ‘Get me out of these clothes, I’m soaked. Ali, Archambault, Gudin—anybody.’

The aide-de-camp disappeared, followed by the tall man. Baggy Trousers, the boy and Archambault closed round him. In the background, Exquisite hovered, attentive, solicitous. Nobody noticed *her*. His light grey overcoat, his green uniform with red facings were pulled off; then there was a great to-do with his sodden boots. They tugged and struggled as he sat on the bed. His breeches were muddy to the thighs.

‘I shall dine in bed,’ he said.

And still nobody noticed her! His waistcoat was off, his shirt pulling over his head. She took her chance and fled before they stripped him. In the duty room half a dozen officers crowded round a cheerful fire, talking in undertones, the tall man amongst them.

Marie stood, hesitant, waiting. Exquisite, at the bedroom door, called in a high-pitched voice, ‘The aide-de-camp on duty, please. His Majesty is asking for the Maréchal Duc de Dalmatic, for General Bertrand, for his dinner to be served to him at once . . . for M. Marchand to be sent to him as soon as he arrives.’

A handsome young man, tall with fair hair and an air at once supercilious and commanding, in the blue and silver, left the group by the fire and went hurriedly into the bedroom. The tall man, General Bertrand, followed him. Marie slipped

away into the kitchen. There a feverish dishing-up was in progress. Marie, unwanted, watched the ritual of Chandelier giving rapid orders, of Pierron, stately, marshalling his procession of two footmen, conducting them with the dinner tray and the wine to his Imperial master.

'He didn't mind the earthenware too much,' he said on return. 'He looks done up. He's not well, if you ask me; that grey look.'

'He'll be much better after *my* dinner.' Chandelier was complacent. 'He hasn't eaten since early this morning, and then only a mouthful, and it's past nine now.'

The kitchen suddenly filled with young men, aides, orderlies, pages, demanding food—cold meat, bread and cheese, anything—brandy.

'No brandy here.' Chandelier was firm. 'You must make do with beer.'

'Beer! Rotten Belgian stuff, I suppose.'

'I'm freezing. I wonder if the civilians have got any brandy; they generally do themselves pretty well.'

'They won't share it with you if they have. They're delicate creatures, they can't stand campaigning except with all the comforts.'

'Neither can I.'

The fair-haired young man had joined the crowd. 'This is a picnic compared with Poland and Spain, my friend.'

'God! With this cloud-burst going on all the time!'

'Anyway, mon Général, you were staff even then.'

'Berthier's—we lived pretty hard.'

He went away.

'Flahaut always likes to make out what a lot he has suffered,' someone said acidly.

'Most of it's blague.'

'What can you expect? Talleyrand's son.'

'And left-handed brother-in-law to the Emperor.'

'What do you mean, Montesquiou?'

'Flahaut is father to a child of Queen Hortense's and as she's the Emperor's sister-in-law . . .'

'A child? When? I have never heard about that.'

'Oh, about four years ago. How should you hear? It is a dead secret!'

'But *you* know.'

'Well, Montesquiou's father was Great Chamberlain for years,' put in another voice, 'he would get all the news.'

Someone else remarked, 'So Queen Hortense isn't all she makes herself out to be?'

'Think of her mother,' said another.

'Hum—yes. Josephine was pretty flighty in her youth, I've heard.'

'Not *only* in her *youth*.'

'And there *was* the story about the Emperor and Hortense.'

'No!' A fierce voice interrupted. 'None of that here, if you please. All of it is Royalist slander.'

'Beg pardon, La Bedoyère. I forgot you were a fidèle des fidèles.'

'I hope we *all* are here.' La Bedoyère, a young man, dark-eyed and with a stern mouth retorted.

'One can't help hearing rumours.'

La Bedoyère, angrier still, said, 'We can avoid *repeating* them. The Emperor is a man of decent, normal habits. If he *does* take a woman occasionally—who doesn't?'

There was silence. Some looked at the ceiling, some at the floor.

'Who *doesn't*?' La Bedoyère repeated, more loudly. 'Can any of you—*us*—say truthfully . . . ?' His sword hand went to his left thigh, where the sword should be.

Someone hastily returned to the original subject.

'Flahaut *does* give himself the most insufferable airs. The Emperor favours him too much.'

'He can be very fascinating, they say.'

'But fancy letting him revise—on his own—Davout's list of officers for promotion. Fancy putting *Flahaut* over Davout, the best brain amongst the Marshals, the Duc d'Auerstädt the Prince d'Eckmühl. The hero of a hundred fights, to be *corrected* by Flahaut—the drawing-room general!'

'I couldn't put it better myself,' said La Bedoyère, mollified. 'Particularly as the Emperor's first idea was a

commission of three—Lobau, Flahaut—and myself. Flahaut's tact—got *us* shelved.'

'*Tact, my God! Tactful and incompetent. . . .*'

They drifted out, with their mugs of beer and bread and cheese, still discussing injustices.

Archambault put his head round the kitchen door, calling urgently, 'Where's mademoiselle? The fire has gone out again. Come quickly, please. . . .'

Now indeed she would be seen and perhaps scolded. Weak at the knees she went, not noticing the footman's appraising glance. She was about to serve the Emperor—personally.

He was eating his dinner in bed, reclining on one elbow. His blue-grey eyes in his dead pale face flashed, his brows knit at sight of her. She must again go through the cross-examination. . . . His questioning voice was harsh and abrupt.

While she remade the fire, burning her fingers on the hot faggots, wielding the bellows, she felt he was watching her. When the fire was bright again, he pushed aside the dinner tray and sat up.

'Come here.'

She came, trembling, reluctant.

By the wrist, he pulled her towards him, looked at her searchingly. With his free hand he caressed her hair gently, smoothing its whole length, twisting the curls round a finger—meditatively.

'You have lovely hair—chestnut coloured—just like . . .' and he sighed, 'Josephine's.' That name first heard a moment ago, still meant nothing to her. Seeing that, he smiled for the first time, a tender, captivating smile. 'You are very—too young,' and sighed again. She lied, enjoying it, 'Seventeen, Your Majesty.'

'Oh—so very old . . .' His hand caressed her, very gently. Her whole body quivered at his touch. 'A pretty white neck, dear little breasts—little hands, but they need caring for. . . .'

'So much scrubbing,' she murmured.

'Poor little hands.' He pressed one to his cheek, drew it slowly towards his lips and kissed it lingeringly. 'And,' his

eyes passed over her, 'little feet in clumsy shoes. But little feet and little hands—and lovely hair—what more? . . .'

There came a knock at the door, and he pushed her gently away saying quickly, 'Go—but come back, come back—later.'

Exquisite was announcing, 'The Duc de Bassano requesting audience, the Maréchal Duc de Dalmatie for battle orders, General Milhaud reporting on reconnaissance patrols, General Radet reporting on police matters, Colonel Gourgaud for the password.'

His deep voice, in the usual timbre of command, said, 'Admit the Duc de Bassano.' Bassano hustled past her. In the duty room, waiting for audience were three seemingly very superior officers and a younger man in the dark blue of an orderly.

Gazing at them, she fell over the legs of Baggy Trousers, sitting on the floor, pitched forward, and landed on the chest of another man, stretched his full length before the fire.

'The devil!' he said, and pushed her off.

'Merely the latest angel—if you ask me,' said another laughing.

'Enough to give a brass monkey a stand—if you ask *me*,' said a third. There was a great burst of laughter.

The Duc de Bassano, reappearing, said, 'Really, gentlemen, really,' adding, 'Too busy to bother about the Council reports from Paris. Go in, Soult and Radet, if you please.'

Uncomprehending, but furious, Marie fled, her face burning.

There was now a pile of washing-up to do. Pierron and Chandelier had disappeared. Young men kept coming in demanding food and drink from the kitchen boys. They got served with lukewarm pieces of chicken, hunks of bread and mugs of beer. Soon they ran out of mugs, and men were sharing. All ate ravenously and with their fingers. More casks of beer were brought. She wondered: was this going on all night?

She was tired, but wide awake and quivering with excitement.

People tramped about overhead. The background noise of marching feet, horsehoofs and gun carriage wheels went on. Fleury was hovering round, taking his time over a last drink and getting warmed up by the kitchen fire.

Fain appeared. 'Would you believe it, the chef and the maître have pinched the fourth bed!'

'Come and join us in the barn, monsieur—all are welcome.'

'I shall have to.'

'The pages—the little darlings—are bedded down already. You had better stake out your claim quickly. I've got my corner nicely arranged. I shall be off there in a moment.'

Fain grimaced and walked out.

A young man whom she had not noticed before, passed him in the doorway. He was very neat in black civilian dress, his linen very clean, his shirt frill beautifully pleated—a great contrast to the military men.

Fleury said, 'Hullo, Authéry, come for a bite and a drink?'

Authéry's voice was mincing. 'No, merely to find mademoiselle. The Duc de Bassano requires clean linen on his bed. Will you kindly see to it at once, mademoiselle?' And to Fleury, 'He also wishes to know where the Portfolio is.'

'Asleep in the barn I should think.'

'That is most irregular. . . .'

She went away and Fleury followed her upstairs.

The Duc de Bassano stood at the stairhead. He seemed greatly agitated. 'Fleury, where is the Portfolio?'

'In the barn, I think, monsigneur, probably already snoring his head off.'

She dived into the linen cupboard, began fumbling with sheets. It was almost impossible in the dark, and she must find double bed—and Madame had rearranged them all only—was it really only *this* morning?

The Duc de Bassano was expostulating. 'But the Portfolio must sleep in the house. I insist. The Portfolio must *always*

sleep in the Palace. I never heard of such an irregularity.' Marie giggled. The old gentleman was terribly fussy.

'I'll send him to you, monseigneur. Perhaps—he could share your bed.'

'Impossible! I will *not* sleep with the Portfolio—but he must be *in the Palace*.'

An officer—that dark-haired man with the long nose and disagreeable mouth, whom she had seen waiting for audience, came heavily upstairs. 'Hello, Bassano, off to bed? Between the sheets? Lucky fellow,' he said.

'Well, Soult? I hope all the arrangements are going well.'

'He's very difficult tonight. I've begged him to call in Grouchy—we'll need him. Thirty-four thousand men and ninety-six guns. *He* pooh-poohs the idea. Prussians done for, for a few days. I argue: then why not use Grouchy on the right, against the English—*here*, while Blücher is licking his wounds? Unnecessary: Wellington is a bad general. I argue further. He taunts me. *I* think Wellington a good general—just because he beat *me* in Spain. He scoffs at the English troops—*bad* troops, too slow in manœuvre, too cumbersome in formation. I tell him Wellington has got exactly the position he likes: a slope in front, a ridge for the guns, level ground behind for the first line of infantry, good forward posts *and* a slope in rear to protect his reserves. Perfect, for Wellington's kind of battle. How do I know all this? What wonderful powers of observation—in fog and pouring rain. I remind him that I fought over this ground in '94—as Chief of Staff to Leféuvre. I *could* have added, "When *you* were merely a penniless artillery officer".'

'But you didn't, of course?'

'What do you suppose? *He* likes to remember that sometimes, but *only* when it suits him.'

"When I was a lieutenant of artillery," Bassano quoted, smiling. 'You've heard that tale of the "parterre of Kings" at Erfurt?'

Soult said sourly, 'Plate-band, wasn't it?'

(What *did* he mean? 'A flower-bed of Kings'?)

General Bertrand appeared at the stairhead. Soult glared

at him, growled, ‘Well, Bertrand? Settled *Him* to sleep?’

Bertrand returned the look with a haughty glance and made no answer.

They don’t like each other, thought Marie and, head in air, marched out of the linen cupboard and into the bedroom. Soult started in alarm.

‘Only that girl,’ Bassano murmured. ‘She won’t understand.’ The three men came into the room, while she stripped and remade the bed.

‘Grouchy has had no orders since the letter you wrote, Bertrand, about one o’clock yesterday when I was back at Fleurus. To explore towards Namur and Maëstricht, wasn’t it? I haven’t received a copy for my order book yet.’ Soult sounded annoyed.

Bertrand was calm. ‘Yes. “Proceed to Gembloix with Pajol’s and Exelmans’ cavalry, Teste’s division and the two corps under your command—explore”—as you say—“towards Namur and Maëstricht. . . . Pursue the Prussians, so that the Emperor may be able to . . . penetrate, yes, penetrate what Blücher is intending to do.” He repeated that phrase twice, “To discover whether the Prussians are separating from the English or whether they intend to unite to cover Brussels. . . . Manœuvre always to keep in touch with the Emperor on his right and keep your lines of retreat open. Our headquarters will be at Quatre Bras.”’

Soult exclaimed, ‘And we have already *left* Quatre Bras. Grouchy will suppose us still there. I begged the Emperor at least to call him to this side of the Dyle. That water barrier may very well baulk us and only the bridge at Ottignies is of stone and wide enough for troops to cross at a smart pace, and the only one suitable for artillery at all. At the moment, Grouchy should be almost due east of us here. If he is allowed to proceed, as instructed yesterday, farther north. . . .’ He shrugged, ‘But “No,” *He* says, “no need. Grouchy will know what to do when he finds out Blücher’s intentions.” But will he? Will he? He’s a cavalryman—none better—but this is his first independent command. And, consider his corps commanders; Vandamme a quarrelsome

fellow, Gérard, angry because Grouchy got the baton instead of himself. They're both strong characters—and Grouchy is a Marshal of only a forthnight's standing.'

'What an awkward concatenation of circumstances.'

(An awkward what of what? The old gentleman used very long words.)

The bed was now made. She lingered, arranging the dressing-table appointments, admiring the silver backed brushes, the silver boxes and flasks.

Soult went on, 'Radet has been in, ready to *resign*. His police can't manage the troops in the rear. They're scattered in all directions, pillaging the farms. What can you expect? *What can you expect*? They had four days' ration at Charleroi, three days ago—all gone now, of course—and the provision waggons are stuck somewhere.' He sighed, turned to the door. 'I'm off to bed in my boots as usual. Sleep well. Battle orders for five o'clock are going out. *Quite* impossible—*of course*. Only d'Erlon's corps is in bivouac in the line—and the light cavalry. There's more than half the army still to come up—and only the turnpike road is passable.'

'Dear me!' said Bassano.

Bertrand smiled.

Soult again: 'And it's still pouring in torrents. Attack at midday at the earliest, I should say. But *He*'s in one of his faraway moods when everything is as *He* imagines it to be. *And—and* Milhaud told him that his patrols have sighted Prussians. Nonsense, figment of the imagination, must be stragglers or deserters. Ah, well, if you say bedtime prayers, Bassano, pray that Grouchy uses his head tomorrow.' He laughed grimly, and went away along the passage. His bedroom door banged shut.

Bertrand, still smiling, said, 'Soult doesn't suit the Emperor at all. *He* misses Berthier, the industrious clerk, who *never* argued. Soult's a man of action—and ambitious. A bad appointment, but it can't be helped now. I wonder, was Berthier's death suicide or apoplexy?' He shrugged, bade Bassano good night and went to his own bed.

The Duc de Bassano turned his attention to the newly

made bed, approved the fresh linen, thanked Marie and asked for something hot to drink—milk perhaps. It aided sleep.

On the stairs she met the pale young man, stumping up.
‘Are you the Portfolio?’

‘Unfortunately, I am.’ He gave a huge yawn straight in her face, without apology. ‘I was beautifully asleep and M. Fleury sent me in. He says Old Stickleback wants me. Where is he?’

‘Stickleback?’

‘The Duc de Bassano, I *should* say.’

She indicated the room, added, because he looked so tired, that he could have her bed for the night. ‘It’s along at the end, behind that torn curtain.’

‘Blessings on you! I shall report to Stickleback and retire to it at once.’ Another huge yawn and they parted.

When she brought the hot milk, the Duc de Bassano was snugly in bed. ‘Ah, with this, and now that the Portfolio is in the house I shall hope to sleep well.’ She left him sipping contentedly.

There was a carriage at the door when she came down. A young man, very neat in dark civilian dress was getting out. Under the light of the torches, he looked dead tired.

Orderlies irrputed from the duty room. ‘Marchand! At last—where *have* you been? The Emperor’s been asking for you for hours.’

‘We overset into a stream near Genappe. It took two hours to haul us out, and then we couldn’t get through the troops. *And* the postilion missed this place. We went past as far as the forward positions.’

‘Go to the Emperor at once! He said to send you in. He has been in bed since nine o’clock.’

She sat down wearily on a hard chair in the kitchen, thought regretfully of the Portfolio occupying her bed. Then, with a spurt of excitement remembered, ‘Come back—later.’

But will this M. Marchand come, perhaps he wouldn’t

want to see her. She realized she would be bitterly disappointed. She made up the kitchen fire, went back to the hard chair, and head on arms on the table, slept.

When she woke, M. Fleury was sitting on the table, swinging his legs and smiling down at her.

‘You’ve been asleep ages—I thought you would never wake up.’

‘What time is it?’

‘Nearly one o’clock, I think. I’ve not introduced myself properly. I’m Fleury de Chaboulon, Secretary to His Imperial Majesty.’

‘I’m Marie Houzeau.’

‘I know.’

‘I thought you were going to sleep in the barn?’

‘Quite hopeless. What with the ones snoring and the ones who are awake because they’re worrying—Flahaut and La Bedoyère talking about glory, Fouler fussing over forage for the staff horses, Drouot going out every half-hour to look at the weather and feel the ground—sleep’s impossible there. Drouot says we must have sun and wind for several hours before we can move the guns. I suggested putting off the battle for a day or two—that was *not* well received. Besides it’s much warmer in here and I like the company I find. How about giving me that chair and sitting on my knee?’

‘I don’t think I want to particularly.’

‘Candid girl! What shall we do then?’

‘Tell me about the Emperor. Do you know him well?’

‘Pretty well. I was with him on Elba and we had lots of talks there.’

‘What’s Elba?’

He told her, and then entertaining tales of long conversations with the Emperor all ending in his agreeing with Fleury. They were interrupted by Marchand carrying in an armful of wet clothes. Marie helped him spread them before the fire.

‘His Majesty would like his bedroom fire made up now, mademoiselle. Will you take in some wood? We have none.’

She went to the wood-shed, filled a basket very slowly, panic-stricken. . . .

He was sitting on the edge of his bed in shirt and clean white breeches, a splendid dressing-gown of crimson and gold thrown round his shoulders, smiling as she came in. She thought him fascinating when he smiled, and, in spite of the pallor of his face, strikingly handsome.

‘Ah—so you have come back?’

‘You wished to have your fire made up—Your Majesty.’

‘Really I only wanted to see you. Put down that basket and come here.’

Instead, she backed away. The request was repeated, he held out a hand. ‘Little bird, don’t be frightened. I shan’t hurt you. . . .’

Gathered to him, he murmured into her hair. ‘Un baiser de sa bouche en fut le médecin.’ (Full understanding came to her.)

For a while she trembled violently in his arms, but he set to soothe her—endearments, caresses, kisses unimagined. Presently she was quiet, reassured, blissfully happy. He wasn’t a stranger or an Emperor any more. She told him so, very softly.

‘Good—then I can tell you what I should like. If I gave you a silk dress, and a silk shift and satin shoes with diamond buckles and diamonds for your hair, would you wear them for me?’

‘Ooh—it sounds wonderful. I’ve never had anything *silk*.’

‘Poor little girl! What a shame! Never mind, you shall. And M. Nitôt shall set the diamonds specially for you. And when you have put them on for me—will you—take them off—for me? All of them?’

‘Oh—I don’t know.’

‘Try to decide.’ His lips nuzzled her brow, her eyes, then closed on her lips for what seemed a long and achingly wonderful time.

Presently, released reluctantly, she whispered, ‘I think I would.’

‘Then without waiting till I can buy you the pretty things, will you take off this cotton dress for me?’

‘Oh—that’s different.’

‘Why, different?’ He sounded disappointed. ‘Try to tell me—why different?’

‘I should be a different person in the silk things—nicer . . . more . . . suitable.’

‘Oh, no, not nicer or more suitable. You are entirely suitable now—just as you are. Little bird, little Marie, dearest little Marie. . . .’ Her head was swimming, she was drowning in happiness. ‘Let me show you how suitable you are—now.’

Afterwards, with him lying in her arms, moaning softly, she felt in complete command of the situation. She was infinitely old and wise and yet as young as her years in joyous satisfaction. The rain drummed on the road, swept in squalls against the window-panes, the ground bass of marching feet went on, but they were alone together in a dream world.

Suddenly the prosaic present swung back upon her.

‘The fire’s nearly out—I came to make it up—what will people say—that M. Marchand?’

‘Dear Marchand! Almost as a son to me.’

She was at once jealous of Marchand, who saw him every day and brushed his clothes and shaved him. She told him so.

He laughed gaily. ‘He doesn’t shave me, I always shave myself—and as to brushing clothes . . .’

‘Let me get up and do the fire—please.’

Unwillingly, cursing the fire, he let her go. She slipped into her dress and put on Marie Houzeau, the maidservant, again.

‘Never worry about what people say,’ he advised her. ‘I never have.’

‘But you’re different, Your Majesty.’

‘Shame on you! I’ve just taught you to call me Bonaparte—as Josephine did—and already you’re forgetting. Say it. . . .’

‘Bonaparte, Your Majesty.’

‘No “Majesty”—just Bonaparte—as though you owned me.’

'Bonaparte,' it was a whisper and lower still, 'dear Bonaparte.' She was on her knees mending the fire. It blazed brightly quite soon. He wrapped the dressing-gown around him, went to the window, drew back the curtain. 'Still raining in torrents—after half past one—nearly twelve hours' unceasing rain. The devil's own luck.'

'M. Fleury told me the weather is very important to-day.'

He swung round abruptly. 'Fleury—what does *he* know about it? Don't believe that young good-for-nothing, he's full of tall stories. But it is important—vitally important, my dear, literally vital. . . .'

'What is vital—please?'

'A matter of life or death.'

'For you?' she wailed.

'For me—but I don't really matter—but for France for generations perhaps. And France must live.'

She was crying bitterly. 'But you *do* matter!'

'Tears for me! How wonderful! Few women have cried over *me* unless they wanted something.' He sighed, stooped to kiss her forehead. 'Now you must go.'

She was choking with her tears. 'Shall I—ever—see you again?'

'Assuredly. You shall come to me tonight—in Brussels. Don't be afraid. I shan't forget. Open the door softly—and go.'

With infinite care she stepped over Baggy Trousers sleeping across the threshold—or wasn't he really asleep?—tiptoed around the sprawling bodies. There were seven men, fully dressed, pillowled on saddle bags wrapped in cloaks, on that floor.

Marchand was sitting on the stairs, arms folded, eyelids drooping. Another shamming sleep?

Fleury said, 'You've been the devil of a time.'

'The fire was very tiresome. I *couldn't* get it to go.'

'You're a quick learner,' he said and grinned. 'But,' and this more to himself, 'what a hussar!'

‘Oh—no—everyone says hussars are dreadful!’ She could have bitten off her tongue.

‘Not as astute as I thought! But no chance for *me* now.’ He kissed her on the nose.

‘There never was—under any—any—con—concatenation of circumstances.’ It sounded wonderfully dignified.

‘Wherever did you learn *that*? Not . . .’

‘M. le Duc de Bassano taught it me.’

He laughed gaily. ‘Old Stickleback to the life!’

‘That’s what M. le Portfolio called him. What *is* a portfolio?’

‘That green leather case he carries about with him. All the Emperor’s secrets are locked up in that. Don’t you go meddling with the portfolio.’

He was still teasing her, laughing and patting her, and she maintaining her most Imperial dignity—as he called it—when a swarm of kitchen boys, sleepy and tousled—burst in upon them.

‘The plate waggon has come at last. Captain Coignet says we must clear it at once to get the waggon away.’ They scurried back and forth, colliding in the gloom, nearly upsetting the solitary candle. Silver plates, dishes, bowls, cutlery, piles of napkins and table cloths, cases of wine. There wasn’t an inch of table or shelf space anywhere. And then they all vanished as suddenly as they had come.

‘Well, what a to-do, and now no elbow room for us,’ said Fleury. They looked at the muddle helplessly. ‘We’ll leave it for Chandelier to arrange in the morning,’ he added. ‘It’ll serve him right for pinching the fourth bed.’

All was quiet now. . . . They went together to the front door, Fleury’s hand seeking hers. The road was empty under the ceaseless downpour. Hands joined, they stood, content, waiting. . . .

PART 2

'Ninety chances to ten'

'Wellington has thrown the dice and our number has turned up.'

Napoleon to his officers at breakfast, Le Caillou, 18th June.

THE clock had struck two when the stillness was broken by the sound of a galloping horse. A moment later, the rider reined up, dismounted and ran to the door.

The sentries challenged: 'Halte! Qui va là?' Their bayonets clashed together, denying entry. 'Mot d'ordre!' they said simultaneously.

The horseman stormed, 'Password! How should I know your damned password? I've dispatches from Marshal Grouchy. Urgent! Let me in, you b——s!'

Growls from the sentries and the messenger, louder, more insistent, 'Somebody come and let me in! Ohè! From Marshal Grouchy!'

The seven men bounced out of the duty room.

The newcomer: 'Colonel Gourgaud, pour l'amour de Dieu . . .'

Gourgaud put the bayonets aside. 'I know this officer—let him pass. "Biron—Brest—Bonté"—for future reference.'

The messenger, drenched and dripping stepped into the house, opening his satchel as he came.

'This to the Emperor at once.'

Gourgaud, taking the sealed packet, disappeared.

'Where's there a fire? I'm soaked to the skin,' said the messenger, relieved of his duty.

The six men remaining, ushered him into the kitchen. His teeth were chattering with cold, he threw off his cloak, his shako and his gloves, held his numbed hands to the fire. Fleury and Marie stood in the background.

A chorus demanded: 'Where have you come from? Where's Grouchy?'

'Give me some brandy and I'll tell you.'

'There isn't any, brandy.'

‘There must be. . . . The Emperor always has brandy with him. Brandy, for the love of Heaven!’

Someone pounced on a case of wine, set down amongst the muddle in the kitchen. The case opened, a bottle of brandy produced, he unconcernedly opened it and thrust the bottle at the messenger, who gulped, sighed, ‘Ah . . . !’

The chorus again: ‘Now—where have you come from?’
‘Gembloix.’

‘Where’s that?’

‘The end of the world you would think. Eastwards from here. I’ve been riding for hours looking for you. How the devil are we expected to get through with dispatches when we don’t know the way, never get a sight of a map, never get asked if we’ve a horse that can walk let alone gallop—pitch dark night, filthy cart tracks—nobody to know whether you fall into a ditch and break your leg? Rotten, rotten organization!’

‘Yes—but tell us—what’s happening with Grouchy?’

‘Didn’t you know we were advancing towards Brussels?’

‘Didn’t you know we are to *sleep* in Brussels tonight?’

‘Didn’t you know . . . ?’

‘Name of a name! *They* told me headquarters was at Quatre-Bras.’

‘We left there this—no, yesterday midday.’

‘So I found out. Quatre-Bras was a dreadful sight—what you could make out—corpses everywhere, peasants stripping them—leaving them stark naked. I fell in with a patrol of Girard’s division, left behind to collect the wounded, they said. You had gone north, they said.’

‘So we have!’

‘But—north—pitch black and pouring rain. By good luck I struck the right road and got to, what is it?—Oh, yes, Genappe.’

‘Yes, the place with the very long narrow street. There was quite a fight with the English cavalry there yesterday. Some of them stood and beat us off, but not for long.’

‘There was a ball in full swing *there*.’

‘A ball!’

'Yes. At the Roi d'Espagne. Nice place I should think; Wellington was there last night, they said. Prince Jérôme was leading out the prettiest girl in the village and the officers of Reille's corps were having a high old time with the rest of the female population. Nothing to do till morning they said, so why not dance? I asked everywhere for headquarters. Oh, somewhere up the road they said. So I came on. Both sides of the road littered with Reille's men, sleeping in heaps. I thought for a bit they were all dead men too, but I found some enterprising chaps roasting a sheep over an open fire, so I knew they were all right. I pushed on then—and here I am. Any idea of the time?"

'Just struck two.'

'Sacred Name! Then I've been four solid hours looking for you—or all but.'

More questions.

'But what's Grouchy up to anyway? Has he caught up with Blücher?'

'Name of a name! No. The ground's awful and the old fox had fifteen hours' start remember. Marched all night—manhandling the guns. Anything to get away, I suppose.'

'Haven't you taken any prisoners?'

'Aren't the patrols after him?'

'Aren't the peasants helpful?'

And a contradiction: '*Peasants* are full of *ideas*, all worse than useless.'

'Surely there's scouting going on?'

'Give me *time*, you fellows! Pajol's cavalry has collected guns, forage carts, some ammunition waggons and a lot of cows.'

'Cows! Sacred Name! Why cows?'

'Exelmans' Dragoons are out too. They sent word that some Prussians are probably retiring on Wavre. Those *might* be a nuisance. But most of them are off to Namur and Liège. They'll be out of the fight for days.'

'I always *said* if we beat old Blücher first . . .'

'*You* always said . . .'

'Where is Wavre anyway?'

Questions, comments, chaffing went on.

Then, by ones and twos, more young men, in dripping cloaks and sodden shakos pushed in. Soon a dozen or so were jostling round the fire. Another bottle of brandy was opened.

One, plastered from head to foot in mud, with scratched face and hands, implored Marie's help. 'Mademoiselle, clean me up. I've been thrown twice.'

She put a pan of water on to heat, helped him off with his uniform, friends tugged off his boots and, stripped to shirt and drawers, he stood back to the fire, a mug of neat brandy restoring him. Another arrived limping, a third had been obliged to shoot his horse. 'Leg broken—poor old fellow.'

'What game have you been up to anyway?' Grouchy's messenger, warm and dry now, asked unfeelingly.

'Delivering battle orders to commanders who aren't there,' said one bitterly. 'Half the army isn't past Genappe yet. All the way there to reach Reille even.'

'Oh, I know *all* about Genappe and Reille,' said the messenger. 'Were they still dancing at the *Roi d'Espagne*?'

'Most of them. Reille himself was in bed—and not too pleased to be woken up.'

Exquisite walked in.

'The aide-de-camp on duty, please. The Emperor is asking for the Maréchal Duc de Dalmatie *and* for you, Colonel Gourgaud.' Gourgaud followed him out.

'Who's that foppish fellow?' the messenger asked.

'Chamberlain to His Majesty, the *Marquis de Turenne*.'

'What a come-down for a famous name.'

Gourgaud was soon back. 'Keep on the alert all of you. I'm ordered forward to see whether the English are holding their position. *He's* in a fever of anxiety for fear they'll slip away. Attack at five, is still the order.' He was gone before the chorus of protest broke out.

'So *that* was our message! Imbecility!'

'In *this* weather?'

'Guns will stick fast—old Drouot will have a fit.'

'Mad—mad—mad!'

The clock struck three. The chattering, still venting their feelings, dispersed.

The sky was faintly grey with approaching dawn. Damp cold fog hung over the yard. The messenger murmured, 'I suppose my answer will be ready soon,' and went away to the duty room. Fleury followed him.

Marie, left alone, looked helplessly at the mess and muddle. The table cluttered with the Imperial silver, the floor with sodden cloaks, gloves, shakos, the dirty discarded uniform. She must try to tidy up and began by hanging the uniform over a chair before the fire.

'The Emperor is getting up. Really hot shaving water, if you please, mademoiselle. And his chocolate.'

Marchand's voice startled her. He repeated his request.

She feared she wouldn't make chocolate to the Emperor's satisfaction—perhaps monsieur would see to it himself.

'Hot and sweet,' said Marchand and left her.

The house was awakening. The sound of voices now familiar, came from the hall.

Soult: 'The attack's put off till nine o'clock. Ground's impossible.'

Gourgaud: 'The English are still in position, their bivouac fires are still burning.'

Chandelier and Pierron and the kitchen boys, sleepy, grubby, tousled, grumbling appeared.

Chandelier: 'Ah, the plate at last,' and, 'Who has been at the Emperor's brandy? The Emperor wants his chocolate? Very good.'

Pierron began sorting the silver.

Marie was ordered to wash a special pan, bring rolls and fresh butter from a basket.

'We shall have them *all* here, in a moment,' said Pierron gloomily. 'Fetch water from the well, you boys; buckets and buckets of it.'

The boys ran out, fought at the well, squabbling for fair shares—and quick service—from grooms who were drawing

water for the horses. The yard was now alive with bustle and noise. The clang of hammer on anvil—a cast shoe being replaced, General Fouler and his assistants shouting orders for horses to be saddled.

The battalion in the orchard, joining in the queue at the well, plunged their heads turn by turn in a bucket of cold water, apparently enjoying the sensation.

'What are all these dirty clothes doing?' said Chandelier. 'I can't have them here.'

His boys scooped up armfuls, tossed them into the passage where anyone could fall over them. Young men, swarming in, demanding shaving water, mostly did, with a great variety of oaths. Every available pan was put on the fire.

Chandelier, supremely indifferent, was preparing the Emperor's chocolate with meticulous precision. Pierron began to polish silver with loving care.

Someone said, 'God, I feel lousy.'

'You *can't* be *yet*. We've only been campaigning three days. . . .'

'Four.'

'No, three.'

General argument. 'Four—three—four.'

Somebody, more precise, said, 'Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and now Sunday morning.'

'Where were we on Wednesday?' A challenge.

'Beaumont.'

'I don't count that. The Prince de Chimay's château was comfort beyond my wildest dreams.'

'Lucky devil! *My* billet was filthy. Bed bugs.'

'Then where?'

'Charleroi. We crossed the frontier midday Thursday.'

'I never made out where the frontier was. All this country is exactly alike.'

'Then, Friday night, Fleurus.'

'What a clever chap you are, Montesquiou! How do you know all these things?'

'Which day did we lick the Prussians?'

'Friday, of course.'

‘Why “of course”? I thought it was yesterday.’

‘*Yesterday* we hung about all morning trailing after the Emperor. Don’t you remember? He was talking politics, Jacobins, the nuisance of elected Chambers, public opinion in Paris—all that. And then we got caught in that awful storm.’

‘But that was today.’

‘Imbecile! Today is only half past three or so in the morning, Sunday. The storm began about two o’clock yesterday afternoon, Saturday, the 17th of June *anno Domini* 1815. Now are you satisfied?’

‘But that’s only *three* nights, anyway. Beaumont, Charleroi, Fleurus.’

‘And then last night here.’

‘So it was—you *are* a clever chap, Montesquiou.’

‘Anyway, anyway,’ someone chanted cheerfully, ‘tonight, tonight, mes chers, feather beds with linen sheets and an agreeable woman in Brussels.’

The Portfolio, clasping his green case, drifted in.

‘M. le Duc de Bassano requests shaving water and chocolate and *new* rolls, please.’

‘Hello, Portfolio. Has the green bag slept well? Stickleback wants his chocolate, M. Chandelier.’

‘Monseigneur must wait till the Emperor is served.’

‘M. Chandelier, I am surprised at your want of alacrity in serving Hugues B. Maret, Monseigneur le Duc de Bassano, His Imperial Majesty’s Secretary of State! He requires—at once—a gallon of the hottest water ever boiled and chocolate such as mortal man never dreamed of.’

‘You young gentlemen will have your jokes. But monseigneur must wait.’

‘If there’s anyone stupider than Hugues B. Maret, it’s the Duc de Bassano.’

‘*That’s* not original.’

‘Never said it was, but it’s true.’

‘Who *did* say it?’

‘M. de Talleyrand. He perpetrates all the most carefully prepared impromptus.’

‘I wonder where the damned old rascal is now?’

‘He *was* at Vienna, attending that Congress on behalf of His Most Christian Majesty——’

‘His Most Pottle-bellied Majesty——’

‘King Louis XVIII of France—now *en villégiature* at Ghent.’

‘But all those Congress chaps have gone home, haven’t they?’

‘The Emperor *ought* to have strung Talleyrand up on the railings of the Tuileries long ago.’

‘*He’s* too soft-hearted really.’

‘Lots of people at home ought to be hanged *now*. I’ll tell you——’

‘My dear Montesquiou, are you by chance a politician?’

‘No, but I keep my ears open when I’m in Paris. You *must* know that sentiment there is very bad. Look at the Chamber choosing that Lanjuinais as its President, a man who has been the Emperor’s enemy for ten years—*at least*. Look at Fouché—my God, what a villain—*still* Minister of Police! That’s why we’ve got to get to Brussels tonight. We’ve got to have a quick victory for political as well as military reasons.’

‘We always have quick victories.’

‘No we don’t. We didn’t in Spain—or Russia.’

‘They’re different.’

‘So’s this—in quite another way. We’ve got to beat the English and the Prussians, before the Austrians and the Russians are ready. Mon ami, don’t you remember that the Powers at Vienna *outlawed* the Emperor in March? “The enemy of the human race”, or some such filthy expression? So we’ve *got* to have a quick victory to present them with a fait accompli—to have any hope of a quick peace. And *that* means getting to Brussels tonight as a first step.’

‘You *do* know a lot, mon cher.’ The tone was slightly sarcastic.

‘Of all the rogues, Talleyrand is far the worst. He has been a traitor for years. Taking fat bribes from the Austrians I shouldn’t wonder.’ A new contributor to the conversation.

‘Shut up!’

‘Oh—why?’

Flahaut had come for hot water, wanted chocolate as well. He had obviously overheard, but merely shrugged and smiled. He got his needs attended to quickly and disappeared.

Someone asked, puzzled, 'Is Talleyrand really Flahaut's father? How—?'

'By Flahaut's *mother*, imbecile. How else?'

'I was going to say—how do you know?'

'Everybody knows.'

'I didn't.'

'Poor unfortunate fish!'

Those supplied, drifted off, arguing about politics and traitors. Others, waiting, started to chaff the Portfolio.

'Portfolio, do tell us, are you always chained up to that wretched great case?'

'Always, Monsieur le Capitaine.'

'But how do you—manage—the calls of nature—for example?'

'Shut up! Don't be coarse! There's a lady present.'

'I don't believe she's squeamish—and I really should like to know.'

'I—er—take it with me.' Portfolio was pink with embarrassment. There was a burst of laughter, a friendly pat on the back. 'Poor old Portfolio!—too bad.'

Gourgaud put his head round the door. 'Hurry, you fellows—too much chattering here. You'll be wanted soon. Make yourselves presentable.'

At that they bundled out, with their cups and mugs of water, dispersed themselves in odd corners, scraping their chins desperately and hopefully.

A page came for General Bertrand's hot water and chocolate. Marie went upstairs with Bassano's portion, sighing to see the house look so dreadful. Floors and walls were filthy, dirty gear lay everywhere. What *would* old Madame say?

Grouchy's messenger was hanging about the door of the duty room. 'No message *yet*?' he was saying impatiently.

Gourgaud's voice, 'You had better go without one.'

The young man, shrugging, disappeared.

Bassano accepted his chocolate amiably. He looked like an

elderly baby, pink-faced, and his white hair ruffled to a cock's comb. He assured Marie he had slept quite well, considering. . . . She was politely pleased to hear it, curtsied and left him.

The front door, wide open, let in the damp fog-laden air of a disagreeable morning. She paused there, looked up, and saw a tricolour flag fitted into a new stanchion hanging limp above her. They thought of everything—and just for one night! She made to step into the road, but the sentries growled a warning. So the officer had meant what he had said!

Glancing to the right, she caught sight of a pale face at the bedroom window, a hand raised, drumming on the pane. The Emperor! Eyes downcast, she drew back. She mustn't pry. Last night was an eternity away or perhaps it had never happened.

Troops, passing in seemingly endless ranks, cheered, their officers saluted the flag and perhaps the face at the window.

Gourgaud, coming from the duty room, called his orderlies together and handed out dispatches.

'Revised battle orders to go at once. For attack at nine o'clock precisely. Add this verbal instruction: "As the Emperor passes along the line in inspection, he will *not* be received with the usual military honours, to avoid attracting the attention of the enemy."'

In the kitchen Marie found Chandelier talking about lunch. Lunch already!

'For eight o'clock,' said Pierron. 'For perhaps ten or twelve persons. A knife and fork meal.'

The orderlies streamed through the kitchen, out into the yard, shouting and laughing. 'Fight's on—at last!'

'I hope I'll find a new horse.'

'Take anything they'll give you.'

'I wonder whether old Reille is on the move yet?'

'I've got to find Lobau—miles away I expect. See you in time for dinner.'

'I *hope* I'll find a horse.'

'Take Desirée—why not?'

‘She’s too slow for this game.’

They stamped about the yard, calling for horses, horses. Within minutes they were mounted and away.

‘We *may* have a little peace now,’ said Chandelier. ‘Now—about lunch. . . .’

Fleury drifted into the kitchen, yawning, and asking, like everyone else, for shaving water *and* if you *please*, chocolate. ‘Those poor beggars gone off with nothing inside them. I thought I would let the brouhaha subside. I’ve had quite a nice sleep in the barn for the last couple of hours. Is my lord and master about yet?’

‘The Emperor is breakfasting,’ Pierron told him.

‘Oh, not *Him*. I meant Fain, the man who keeps me in order. First Secretary to the Cabinet and knows it.’

‘He is behind you, monsieur.’

Unabashed, Fleury turned about, wished his superior a good morning. ‘Will you want me today, monsieur?’

‘Probably, there may be copying to do. Please keep about the house.’ Again a request for water and chocolate, and Fain carried his portion away to the duty room.

‘That’s just like him. Hang about, hang about, waiting to do some *copying*. I want to *see* something. I’ve never seen a battle. Have you M. Chandelier?’

‘I have always been too busy to be present at battles, monsieur.’

Pierron called Marie to come and help lay the luncheon table. Luckily, you could pass across the yard and into the dining-room without going through the Emperor’s bedroom.

‘A fortunate arrangement, otherwise we should be in great difficulty,’ said Pierron.

There were three tables of different sizes in the room. They pushed two together. ‘More chairs?’

Only in the Emperor’s bedroom, she told him.

‘Then we must wait.’

The boys were bringing baskets of cutlery, silver plates, napkins, a great array of glasses. Every article had its special

mark, an N surmounted by an Imperial Crown, or twined with a laurel branch. She handled every piece lovingly, smiling. *She* had called him Bonaparte.

They could hear the Emporer's deep voice through the communicating door, talking to Marchand. 'Give me another pair of nail scissors, these are horribly blunt.' A tinkling sound—the scissors must have been flung into the grate.

Pierron smiled. 'He always grumbles about the nail scissors when he's anxious. He uses dozens of pairs a year, Marchand says.'

The deep voice again: 'Marchand, my son, my overcoat. I'm going out.'

Lucky Marchand, handing the overcoat, straightening the collar.

The voice of Exquisite: 'General Haxo reporting, Your Majesty.'

'Let him come in. Well, Haxo?'

Heavy boots and a loud voice. 'I have examined the whole English line with my glass, sire. There seem to be no fortifications whatsoever.'

'Good. How about their advanced posts?'

'At the farm of La Haye Sainte—exactly on the road—as you may remember, sire.'

'Go on—I have the whole position in my mind's eye.'

'At La Haye Sainte they have made some loopholes in the enclosing wall. At Papelotte and La Haye on their left, there appears to be nothing unusual.'

'What do you make the extent of the English position?'

'I should say, from end to end, at most two miles, sire, and slightly convex.'

'Much as I thought. And Hougoumont?'

'No appearance of fortifications, sire. But the house is barely visible in this fog. It lies lower than La Haye Sainte.'

'I know. Their main ridge turns south-west, dipping slightly all the way to the château.'

'Their left wing and left centre are much more lightly held than the rest of their line.'

'Ah! Wellington is presumably anxious about his lines

of communication to Ostend and the sea. Soult reports that Belgian deserters brought news yesterday that a Dutch division is being held on the extreme right around Braine l'Alleud and Merbe Braine—well outside the main position. Wellington will regret that—as he may regret many things today. Thank you, Haxo, you have my leave to go.'

'Now that's *very* interesting,' said Pierron. 'I must tell Chandelier.'

It hadn't conveyed anything to her, but she had listened happily to the voice. It had been a very different voice last night, she dared not remember how different. Now she was only a maid-servant, laying a very special luncheon table. She was learning a great deal from Pierron about that too. Just so—and so—and so—an inch this way, the alignment of a fork, glasses slightly angled—all supremely important.

There was silence in the next room except for Marchand, moving about and humming to himself.

Pierron sent her to the kitchen. Boys came to collect chairs—from the bedroom *and*—no bumping and banging, if you *please*. She helped them and saw the Emperor passing and repassing the window with Marshal Soult and General Bertrand. She liked Bertrand, he seemed to hang over the Emperor as if he loved him. Soult, with sharp dark eyes and set mouth, looked perpetually disagreeable.

All the time troops passed and there was constant cheering: 'Vive l'Empereur!' A band came up: changed from a solemn tune to a gay one.

'Did you hear that, my dear?' Pierron asked. 'They were playing the Chant du Depart and switched to "Où est-ce qu'on peut être mieux que dans le sein de la famille?" He'll like that. They used to play it at the Opéra when he appeared in his box—in the old days. It's a home-coming song.' Pierron sighed.

Of course, she knew neither tune, but if the Emperor liked the second, she liked it too.

The table was laid at last to Pierron's satisfaction, and in the kitchen, Chandelier was setting out dishes of cold meats and a great variety of sweetmeats and fruits. 'Thank God the

Chambertin has come. I should never have forgiven Coignet—,

An orderly came storming through, brushed the cream off some dainties with the edge of his cloak. Where was Colonel Gourgaud? What was the use of being sent to a division that *still* wasn't there? Why didn't people know what they were up to instead of tiring out horses at the beginning of the day? Where the devil?—‘Sorry about the mess, M. Chandelier’—and was gone.

They heard him, calmer, in the hall. ‘If you please, mon colonel, General Durutte’s division isn’t up *yet*.’

‘Not *yet*?’

‘I assure you no, mon colonel.’

‘It should have been up hours ago. Did you go far enough to our right—beyond that village, Planchenoit?’

They went into the duty room and shut the door.

Marie had a great idea, said innocently, ‘Do you think I should go and make the beds, M. Chandelier?’

He laughed out loud at that. ‘You’re a sly one, aren’t you? You want to see what’s going on outside.’

Still looking demure, she said, ‘Well—perhaps—a little.’

Chandelier and Pierron looked at each other. They agreed it ‘couldn’t hurt’.

And Pierron added, ‘I don’t really believe she’s a spy. Are you, missy?’

She found Fleury kneeling behind a half-closed shutter. He checked her exclamation of surprise. ‘Come here and look! Don’t breathe.’

There were more people with the Emperor now. Fleury named d’Erlon, and Milhaud in bright steel cuirass, steel helmet with sealskin turban, and white cloak. Gourgaud was there too, holding his horse by its bridle. ‘He has reported that the English are taking up their battle positions. Here comes General Drouot,’ said Fleury, indicating a severe, elderly man.

The Emperor greeted him gaily. ‘Well, Drouot, shaved as carefully as any dandy! What lady are you meeting today?’

A grunt and then in reply, ‘I wish I were as cheerful as

Your Majesty. On this clay soil we shan't be able to move the guns till ten or perhaps even eleven o'clock.'

The Emperor frowned. 'But the English are moving already! It's only six o'clock, and you would have me wait *five more hours*.'

'With all respect, sire, their problems are not ours. Much of their artillery was in position early yesterday afternoon, before the ground was waterlogged.'

'Now there'll be a rumpus,' Fleury whispered.

But there was silence, except for the Emperor's nervous tapping on his boot with his riding whip.

The officers remained motionless yet attentive.

After a pause, Drouot ventured. 'Even at eleven o'clock, Your Majesty has nine hours of daylight—and a battle rarely lasts more than six hours.'

The Emperor's face cleared. 'Soit! I trust you as I would trust myself when it comes to judging the state of the ground. Clay you say? Sticky at best of times. But there's a westerly breeze getting up. Move the great battery of the Guard into position as quickly as possible. D'Erlon, your supporting artillery is placed?'

D'Erlon's answer was lost in a burst of cheering from the troops. 'Ça va! V'là le rougeaud!'

'Le rougeaud!'

'Le lion rouge!'

A big man, with a big red face astride a big horse, splendid in the dark blue and glittering gold lace of a Marshal, the red, white and blue plumes of his black hat fluttering, had turned out of the cart track beyond the orchard wall leading to Chantelet farm. A single aide-de-camp followed him.

The troops roared again. 'Le rougeaud! Ça va! Ça va! Le rougeaud!'

This big man dismounted at the door, saluted smartly.

'Who is it?'

Fleury whispered, 'Marshal Ney—a great one—"Le brave des braves" the soldiers call him. Been in all the great campaigns.' A string of names rolled off his tongue with

pride. She paid no attention, watching the meeting of those two. The Emperor didn't seem to like the Marshal.

'Why "le rougeaud"?' she asked presently.

'Wait till you see him without his hat.'

A cavalcade of officers came into sight from the direction of Genappe. Slightly ahead rode a young man, his uniform all aglitter with gold and a lavishly plumed hat set at a rakish angle. He didn't bother to salute, merely waved a hand as he dismounted and threw the reins of his horse to an orderly.

The Emperor was curt. 'You're late Jérôme—Reille—' Another officer was saluting—'Where is your corps?'

'We had Your Majesty's order at about six o'clock that the men were to clean their arms and make soup, sire.'

'You were too far in rear to delay for that.'

'The men had had nothing to eat for more than twenty hours, sire.'

'Hein—who is behind you?'

'Kellermann's cavalry, Durutte's division, the infantry of the Guard, sire.'

'Durutte! He should have been in bivouac in the line forward during the night.'

'And then, Lobau, sire.'

'It will be midday before they are up.'

'Later than that, I fear, sire.'

'Soult, this is some muddle of yours. Did you send out no orders for quartering? Are *all* the divisions in disorder?'

Soult mumbled a reply.

The Emperor, again tapping his boot with his whip, said harshly, 'Why, *why* have I not Berthier here? He had common sense! He knew how to marshal an army for battle.'

The young man called Jérôme looked up at the house and Marie saw that in spite of his over-dressed appearance and florid colouring, he was a kinsman of the Emperor.

Answering her unspoken query, 'His young brother,' said Fleury. 'The Emperor dotes on him really, though he doesn't show it.'

'How d'you know?'

'Oh, I just do. You watch them together. Jérôme never gets a scolding, though he does plenty of silly things.'

'I don't think much of your headquarters,' Jérôme was saying. 'Now *I* had a very good bed at the Roi d'Espagne in Genappe. Wellington had it last night. Oh, and by the way, the waiter at dinner said that Wellington's aides were talking openly about a concerted linking up of the English and the Prussians who are on the way towards us from Wavre—if you know where that is.'

'Rubbish!' The Emperor was curt. 'The Prussians are out of action for at least three days after the drubbing we gave them on Friday. Besides, Grouchy's on their tail. . . .'

On the landing someone was calling urgently. Marie went to answer. Dr. Larrey's compliments and could he have some household linen? He would need a great deal. She dared not give away Madame's linen, she said. But the man was firm, though kind. 'I must take if you will not give, mademoiselle. It is, in fact, an order.'

Reluctantly she showed him the cupboard, his companions waiting on the stairs swooped upon it, stripped it bare in minutes. All those precious linen sheets and lace-edged pillow cases and damask towels. . . . !

'Have you made the beds nicely?' Pierron inquired, and laughed good-humouredly when she admitted to having forgotten all about them. She was asking timidly whether she might help to carry in the lunch and see the great ones assembled when wheels creaked loudly and the old familiar covered cart lumbered through the field gate, stopped there and the family of Boucquéau emerged.

Marie's heart sank. Just when everything was so exciting, to have those tiresome people moaning over the dirt and destruction!

The women trailed into the kitchen, young Madame leading Sylvie, old Madame demanding to know what all the carriages were doing in the yard and *who* were all these

strangers in her kitchen? Her husband followed. They all stared, exclaimed, the women wept and Sylvie started to scream. It took quite a time for Pierron and Chandelier and Gourgaud, who was fetched to support their story, to make it understood that the Emperor—the Emperor *Napoléon*—was making use of this house—their house as Imperial headquarters.

Géry, having stayed to unharness the horses, joined his bewildered family. ‘All the cows are gone, their sheds are full of horses, there are sheep lying dead in the field. The barn has two doctors—very great men it seems—and six other surgeons and helpers of all sorts, with trestle tables set up. The hay has been trampled on and ruined, they’ve thrown all our sacks of grain into the yard. They’ve even got some of Maman’s linen sheets—her *best* sheets—and are tearing them into strips. Can you believe it, Papa?’ Old Monsieur could not. The women cried more loudly, but Sylvie, given a sweetmeat from a very special dish, had been quickly pacified. Hugging her doll, she regarded her family with considerable distaste and chattered amiably to the kitchen boy who had sneaked her the sweetmeat. Old Monsieur, roused from his first stupefaction, began to protest. He was ruined, his livelihood destroyed, his house become a pig-sty, his possessions stolen, his crockery broken—that jug in the hearth—he called on Heaven to witness his misfortune! He who had never wronged any man but worked hard all his life, honourably, soberly. . . .

Gourgaud assured him that the Emperor would pay for *all* damage. He always did.

‘But this is irreparable. Where is this Emperor of yours. . . ? I must—’

‘Not at the moment, monsieur. The Emperor is with his commanders. Soon he will breakfast. Then, if I can arrange it, he may receive you.’

‘*Receive* me in my own house. . . .’ Monsieur was rendered speechless again. But the women had plenty to say, they wept and stormed and scolded, even included Marie in the scolding. Why hadn’t she prevented this? Why hadn’t she kept

the doors bolted? Why, for that matter, hadn't she fought the whole French army to defend her master's property? Disloyal, stupid, worthless!

Monsieur said, 'Gently, gently, my dears. It really isn't Marie's fault.' But nothing would stop them. They flounced away upstairs exclaiming at every step. Géry followed them, a slightly grim smile on his face. 'Don't let them make a scene,' his father whispered. 'Not where the Emperor can hear. We might all get shot.'

Chandelier was indignant. 'The Emperor *never* does anything so unjust, monsieur. You will receive adequate compensation for any loss or damage.'

There were cries of dismay from upstairs. The linen cupboard, thought Marie. Géry, running down, confirmed it was the linen cupboard. Angélique was now in hysterics, Maman almost as bad. . . .

'Put them to bed,' said Pierron, suddenly angry. 'We can't have all this noise here—and at this moment. The Emperor will be coming to luncheon.'

Old Monsieur sat down, his head in his hands. 'It's useless. I can do nothing with them—nothing.'

The wailing and screaming went on.

Flahaut stalked in. 'The Emperor wishes to know what all these shrieking women are doing in the house.'

Turenne, the Chamberlain, followed him. 'The Emperor will require luncheon in ten minutes.'

Old Boucquéau looked up, gaped at the blue and silver, the scarlet and silver, of these fine gentlemen.

The screaming was explained to Flahaut, the luncheon promised to Turenne. Géry, very civil, hurried to remove his relations out of ear-shot of the Emperor. His father quavered his request for a meeting with the great man—just a moment—to explain.

Turenne, condescending, reassured him. The Emperor was engaged upon matters of the gravest concern, but he, Turenne, would do his best—later—after luncheon. But M. Boucquéau must make his request very quickly. The Emperor would not tolerate a long explanation. The Emperor

was always ready to do justice and add to that, generosity, in these affairs. They were always unfortunate, of course, but inevitable in war.

Turenne then went away. Boucquéau watched, still fascinated, the scarlet back, with the silver keys embroidered on the skirts of the coat. 'A kind gentleman for all his airs and his finery.'

Pierron was directing the footmen carrying the luncheon trays through the yard and into the dining-room. In the passage, there was a confusion of noise, heavy footsteps, clanking spurs, swords unbuckled and clattering to the floor and loud military voices, all dominated by that deep, husky voice of supreme authority.

Pierron promised Marie that she should help carry in the dessert. Ah—lovely. . . . But by the time they came to the dessert—which proved to be the wonderful array of sweet-meats—she was in a panic. How appear before him this morning after last night?

She need not have worried. He took not the slightest notice of her.

Crowded around the two tables were Bertrand, Bassano, Soult, d'Erlon, Reille, Drouot, Jérôme, Milhaud, and the big man Ney, with his flaming red hair.

The Emperor, in a green uniform with red facings and two very simple medals, his black hat with its only ornament a tricolour cockade *à deux sous*, the plainest dressed man there, sat hunched over the table. He ate quickly and untidily, cramming food into his mouth, stretching to snatch what he wanted without a by-your-leave.

Jérôme lounged at ease, dazzling to behold, with braidings, medals, gold aiguillettes, a hint of lace between the points of his high military collar, his hair curled and scented, a lace-edged handkerchief in the cuff of his coat. The rest were stiff, formal, deferential or friendly. Bassano was finicky in his manners, his prim, precise voice contrasting with the loud voices of the officers.

Marie, lost in interest, had to be beckoned away by Pierron. 'You shall help clear the tables,' he promised her.

As *He* hadn't noticed her, she didn't mind any more—or did she?

Clearing away was a lightning process. Dishes, glasses, plate, cutlery, pell-mell into a basket, and a scuttle to be gone. The cloth was whipped off and bundled up and all three tables pushed close together.

'The maps,' said the Emperor and flung his hat on the table.

The door shut on the conclave.

She washed the dirty dishes, great piles of them, with happiness and disappointment mingled. She was, in a way, serving him . . . but only as a little servant-girl. Yet—and happiness and hope returned, he had said, 'Tonight in Brussels.' He would not forget *that* promise. . . .

Solid ranks of soldiers were passing once again. She felt important, explaining things to M. Boucquéau, who merely sat in the kitchen, much in the way, staring, confused, by the comings and goings.

Fleury sauntered in, said to nobody in particular, 'Reille's corps at last,' and to Boucquéau gazing blankly at him, 'I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir.'

'This is *my* home,' the old man replied mournfully.

'Ah—indeed. You must find it greatly changed. But we shall all be gone by evening. We sleep tonight in Brussels.'

Pages and orderlies clattered about indoors; outside, grooms saddled horses, coachmen swabbed down carriages. farriers and saddlers worked purposefully.

A sergeant and two men of the duty guard came asking for victuals for their battalion in the orchard. Chandelier handed over a great basket of meat and bread and cheese, directed them to the outhouse for a cask of beer.

'Quite a lot of us here, you will think,' Fleury, warming his hands, said cheerfully to Boucquéau.

'And how many are there?' the old man asked.

'Well—impossible to say—quite—more than a hundred, I imagine. Most of us slept in the barn, of course. Quite a

nice comfortable barn, monsieur, as barns go. The big-wigs had the beds.' Fleury gave Chandelier a glassy-eyed look.

'The big-wigs. Hmm!' said Boucquéau.

'And, of course, I'm not counting the grooms, and saddlers and coachmen and Chandelier's kitchen boys and so on in that—or the Guard in the orchard. What numbers would you think, M. Pierron?'

Pierron had no idea, neither had Chandelier. Just the usual people who followed the Emperor. 'On the whole rather less than usual I should say,' said Pierron. 'On the *great* campaigns, the military and civil households are *much* larger.' He gave this opinion with unctuous satisfaction.

'And usually *I* have a *much* larger staff.' Chandelier was not to be outdone. 'I have no assistant chefs here. But this will be a short campaign. In Brussels I can find suitable helpers quite easily.'

'And the Emperor has only two valets. Most unusual.'

'You can hardly call Ali a valet, he merely holds the shaving mirror.'

'And carries the brandy flask in battle,' Chandelier added.

'Is that the man in baggy trousers?' Marie ventured.

'Yes. He's regarded as a Mameluke,' (Whatever was that?) 'but he's really a Frenchman dressed up. Saint-Denis, a good chap, and quite intelligent,' Fleury explained. 'And it needs courage to follow the Emperor around the battle-field. People often get their heads blown off.'

The conversation meandered on. Marie's pile of clean plates mounted quickly with a kitchen boy drying-up for her.

Boucquéau sat hunched and miserable. Géry must have pacified the women, for there was no sound from upstairs. Fleury loitered between the kitchen and the passage. 'They're a long time,' he remarked. 'It's past nine.' He looked out at the sky. 'Blue at last—sun coming along nicely, and quite a good stiff breeze.'

The door of the duty room banged suddenly, heavy footfalls resounded, and a loud voice, shouting in anger in the passage.

Pierron said, 'Ney!—whatever——?'

They clustered behind the kitchen door to listen.

Marshal Ney, his arms flailing the air, was tramping up and down, while Reille stood calmly by in silence.

'He's mad, I tell you, absolutely mad!' Ney was thundering. 'He *disdains* to manœuvre. He intends a *frontal attack*. Artillery pounding, infantry en masse, capture the plateau, follow up with cavalry, lead in the Guard and the battle will be over. Doesn't he *know* that English infantry are unbeatable in a frontal attack, their steadiness, the accuracy of their fire? Doesn't he *know*?'

'The trouble is—he doesn't,' Reille said soberly. 'He has never fought the English as you and I and Soult have—in Spain. The English infantry *may* retire a hundred yards—but then they reform in perfect order. Look what he said to Soult. "This will be no more than a picnic."'

'I don't care what he says to Soult—I hate the man.'

'Don't we all,' muttered Reille, and added, 'Think what he said to *me*, then, when I warned him of their fine qualities—that before you get in with the bayonet, half your men are down—that you can break them, and half of *them* are down but more spring up from nowhere—and carry on.'

'It's what he said to *me* that I resent. Look at him! He sent for me—casually—to meet him on the 14th at Avesnes. I came up with him on the 15th at Charleroi—I'm just to have a *skirmish* with the English along the road to Brussels—just *push them along*. And next day, when I'm fully engaged facing thirty thousand men, I'm to break off the engagement and help *him* against the Prussians. How, will you tell me, do you *break off* a battle? "The fate of France is in your hands." What a message! How . . . Reille, sometimes I think my reason is giving way—this is past bearing.' For a moment he covered his face with his hands. 'I used to be able to face difficult situations, make decisions—but now, now. . . .'

They were standing close together. There was something pitiful in the big man, suddenly crumpling into silence—nearly in tears. 'I can't bear it—these cold looks, this distrust—this—almost hatred—from—him.'

Reille, still calm, his hand on the other's arm, spoke

quietly, 'You know his moods. He disdains us *all*—not merely Wellington and the English. We're none of us fit to have ideas—we're to take orders. *And* they're piecemeal orders—we never get the whole tactical picture—let alone a glimpse of strategy. And then we get scoldings and black looks if we don't carry out orders—and sometimes scoldings if we do—for not having initiative or intuition enough to *disobey* them. He sees what ought to be and not what is—not reality. . . . But—nevertheless—what a man!' He paused. Then his voice became matter-of-fact, 'What worries me is that not one man in ten has had anything to put in his belly for at least twenty-four hours. They finished their four days' bread ration by yesterday morning at the latest. God knows why the provision waggons are stuck at Charleroi.'

Milhaud had come out of the duty room and, joining them, said seriously, 'The horses have had nothing either. My people have been scouting all night, and everywhere the farmers have cut open their feather beds and mixed the feathers with their hay. *That* shows how much the French are beloved in Brabant.' He put on his helmet, took up his cloak and sabre. They all shook hands and he was gone.

'The men are crazily eager for battle, though,' Reille said thoughtfully, and then, 'Perhaps *too* eager—jumpy with nerves. The news of Bourmont's desertion got round. A disastrous blow to morale that. The men see traitors in all their officers.'

'Most of all in *us*.' Ney was bitter. '"Don't employ the Marshals." That's what they said to the Emperor.'

'Some truth——' and Reille stopped abruptly. For the first time there was a faint flush of embarrassment on his stern face.

'Don't remind me—don't remind me,' Ney was piteous. 'Never shall I forgive myself. Retribution waits for me. The iron cage!'

Reille still more embarrassed, said falsely cheerful. 'Still, we have ninety chances to ten, *He* says.'

Ney was again walking back and forth restlessly. 'And nothing left but to die if it's defeat.'

‘Defeat!’ The deep voice, harsh and cold. The Emperor, his black hat en bataille square upon his brow, a light grey dust coat over his uniform, was between them. His eyes set and hard were on Ney. ‘Who is talking of defeat—here—in *my* presence?’

Ney for a moment dignified, bowed, ‘I did, sire. It is always a possibility.’

‘I do not recognize such a possibility. If my orders are obeyed we shall sleep in Brussels—Prince of the Moskowa.’

Ney, cowed as a schoolboy, stood stock still, to attention, continued standing so, until the Emperor and his staff had passed into the open air.

Splendid horses, held by grooms, a crowd of aides-de-camp and orderlies, a squadron of the Chasseurs à cheval of the Guard in the green and red of the Emperor’s own uniform with bearskin caps, plumed, cordoned, waited and, grouped together, Captain Coignet, General Fouler, Ali, the brandy flask slung crosswise, Noverraz, a messenger, with a small valise and second overcoat, a young page, very eager and bright-eyed, a telescope slung on his back, stood on the threshold. The Emperor stopped as his eye lighted on the boy. He pinched his ear, friendly fashion. ‘Well, Gudin, this is a rough apprenticeship for you, but you’ll learn the quicker.’ The boy pink with pleasure, backed away, bowing.

Turenne, pushing past Fleurv, Marie, Boucquéau and the kitchen boys and footmen who had crowded to the door to watch, bowing respectfully, whispered to his master.

‘Hein? Bring him here. But be quick,’ said the Emperor.

Turenne led forward Boucquéau, humble, trembling under the stern, piercing gaze. He muttered his request—farmhouse ruined—stock lost—furniture destroyed.

‘Yes—yes—yes.’ The Emperor was impatient. ‘Don’t worry, monsieur—you shall be recompensed—tenfold. And the Guard in the orchard will remain to protect my headquarters and your home—yes—yes.’

He turned away, then remembering, called for Pierron. ‘Maître—a saddle of mutton, very well done—for dinner tonight.’

Pierron bowed deeply.

'Horses forward! The Emperor will mount.' General Fouler commanded.

A beautiful grey Arab mare, her velvet saddle cloth rich with silver lace, was led to the Emperor. He stroked her nose a moment. 'Good day to you, Marie.'

Captain Coignet, eyes downcast, held the stirrup. There were mountings, salutings, cheers from the soldiers, ceaselessly passing, cheers which echoed and faded as the cavalcade rode between the opened ranks and disappeared round the turn of the road.

Fleury thought: A symphony in black and grey and silver, truly an Emperor.

In the passage, Reille and Ney and Prince Jérôme remained.

Ney took up his hat and sword, said to his aide, 'Let us go, Heymès.' They went out, mounted, and in silence slowly followed the Emperor and his escort.

Jérôme, settling his hat with care, said gaily, 'Napoleon always *did* look like a sack of coals on horseback.'

Reille respectful, but severe replied, 'The Emperor is a very great man, your Highness. It will always be an honour to serve him.'

Jérôme shrugged, 'Oh, I know all that, of course. But after all—brothers, you know.'

They, too, mounted, rode away together over the fields in a westerly direction. The soldiers passing shouted cheerfully, 'V'là le petit frère, Jérôme!' Jérôme paused and waved, smiling. Reille rode on. His back looked disapproving.

'Whatever they say,' said Fleury soberly, 'he *is* a very great man.'

Marie had never seen him so solemn. 'What did the big man mean about the iron cage?'

'I'll tell you sometime—maybe—but not now—not now. It's really better forgotten.'

PART 3

Certainty?

‘Pray keep the English quiet, if you can. Let them all prepare to move, but neither be in a hurry nor a fright, as all will yet turn out well. . . .’

Wellington writing from the Inn ‘A Jean de Nivelles’, Waterloo, to Sir Charles Stuart, English Minister in Brussels, at three o’clock on the morning of 18th June.

‘The British oligarchy will be overthrown, France will arise more glorious, more powerful and greater than ever.’

Napoleon to his Generals, early morning 18th June.

THERE seemed nothing in the world worth doing. Bassano, Fain and the clerk Authéry were sitting in the duty room, looking at one another. The Portfolio was sitting in the passage looking at nothing. The pages not on duty were sitting on the stairs, bemoaning their fate at being out of it all, cursing Gudin's luck. Even Chandelier and Pierron were idle, though Chandelier showed signs of beginning to worry about the saddle of mutton. General Fouler murmured something about seeing the vet. and went off to the stables. Captain Coignet passed through the kitchen, glaring at everybody. Even in the yard the talk was subdued. Only Louvel, a saddler mending a bridle, cursed loudly when he cut his hand and a comrade laughed.

Boucquéau and his son were moaning over the state of the best parlour, moaning more loudly and angrily when they at last learned the fate of the tall cupboard—chopped up for firewood, indeed—their vocabulary of complaints was unending. Luckily, though there was much mud the Tournay carpet, no ink had been spilled.

Fleury mooning about, hands in pockets, wandered into the Emperor's bedroom where Marchand was closing a sword case.

‘What is he wearing today, Marchand?’

‘The sword of Austerlitz, monsieur.’

‘And medals?’

‘The Silver Cross and the Iron Crown.’

‘Not the Grand Cordon?’

‘No, monsieur. He never wears that in battle, I believe. I have not been in personal attendance on His Majesty long enough to be certain. I was a footman in the Household until M. Constant—left.’

‘Deserted, you mean, Marchand, at the time of the abdication last year.’

‘If you prefer the word, monsieur, yes. I went with His Majesty to Elba, you know, as valet. My mother is nurse to the King of Rome in Vienna.’

‘Ah, that poor little boy. A shame to separate him from his father.’

‘A greater shame to separate his father from *him*.’ Marchand grew animated. ‘*And* from his wife. Unnatural behaviour I call it.’

‘The Empress could have come to Elba had she chosen to assert herself—if you ask me—but she is under the thumb of her father, that cold-hearted Austrian dodderer. Besides, there is Neipperg. I wonder if the Emperor knows about *him*.’

‘I hope not, monsieur. It would be such an outrage to his feelings.’

‘Fancy taking up with a one-eyed dandy—after the Emperor of the French—and *such* an Emperor.’

Marchand was folding clothes. He said, hesitantly, ‘May I ask, monsieur, whether the Emperor spoke much to you of the Empress during the time in Elba? You were in his—confidence, I believe.’

‘Never—so far as I remember. We spoke on many topics. He is a fascinating conversationalist. Does he speak of her to you?’

‘Hardly ever, monsieur. But—sometimes—of—the other—and with great feeling.’

‘Ah, yes, the adored Josephine. The love, the great love—in youth—Marchand. Something which only happens once in a lifetime.’

‘Do you believe so, monsieur?’

‘Always, Marchand.’

‘To men and—to women?’

‘To men *and* women both, assuredly.’

‘I shall never forget,’ Marchand hesitated then went on, ‘when he read of *her* death—in an Italian newspaper—last year—May it was—soon after we arrived in Elba. He shut himself up for two days. And when I ventured in—on the

third morning—he was asleep in his clothes, tears on his cheeks. I opened the shutters, offered him his chocolate in the usual way. There was a book flung down on the floor, its pages crumpled. It was the poems of Ossian. He had told me that he loved Ossian more than any other poet—when he was young. The drawers of the chest had been turned out and there was a heap of clothes and handkerchiefs and trinkets on the floor. He must have been looking for some souvenir. Then,’ Marchand hesitated again, ‘then—I saw the souvenir—a few torn and wrinkled rose petals. I thought perhaps a rose from Malmaison—*her* home.’

Fleury murmured, ‘Ah, “Souvenir de Malmaison.” *The* rose—*her* rose—tinted with an almost human pallor.’

Marchand continued, ‘He asked in his normal voice what day it was and I told him Sunday. He had been there, alone, without food or drink, since Friday, but he made no comment and life began again with its normal busy round. That was before you came to Elba, monsieur.’

‘Yes—I’m glad. It would have been—too painful to witness.’ They looked at each other, smiling and sighing.

‘What, Marchand,’ Fleury hesitated, went on, ‘what do *you* think was the bond—with Josephine?’

‘My mother, who was long in the household at the Tuilleries, used to say that she gave him repose, the only repose he ever knew. . . .’

‘Ah—repose—an essential in the life of every human being. Perhaps, yes, the lovely, languid Creole with the lisping voice and the quaint pronunciation of the most ordinary words. Did your mother ever hear that famous “Comme tu es drolle—(wasn’t it?) Bonaparte” from Josephine’s own lips?’

‘I don’t know, monsieur.’ It was apparent that Marchand did know. Fleury, wandering about the room said after a while, ‘Is he carrying the poison today, Marchand?’

‘No, monsieur, he hasn’t carried it since it failed him last year at the time of the abdication. Destiny had decided——’

‘That he should die some other way. How firmly he believes in Destiny!’

'The star, monsieur, always the star—guiding—controlling.'

'In fact the foundation of his belief in *himself*, Marchand. Will it one day fail him—perhaps—even today?'

'No—no, monsieur.' Marchand was urgent in protest. 'He must have many useful years before him. And tonight we shall mark the first step of the new era when we sleep in liberated Brussels.'

'You love this man, Marchand?'

'Yes, monsieur.'

'And he loves you—I know, Marchand. He—you—both of you—are very—lucky. I wish he loved *me*.'

'You find him—appealing, monsieur?'

'He fills my mind—and my heart—and perhaps my soul—I don't know—and yet——' He made a helpless gesture.

Again there was a pause—longer than before—till Fleury said on a lighter note, 'You'll have to write your memoirs one day.'

'Me, monsieur? Whatever about?'

'The Emperor, everything to do with him that you alone can know. How he pared his nails at three o'clock on the morning of the 18th of June 1815.'

'That couldn't interest anyone, monsieur.'

'It will, Marchand, it will. Everything that ever happened to him, everything that he ever did or said will enthral people.'

'Indeed, monsieur, do you think so?'

'Assuredly. And you could tell the tale of Marie Houzeau.'

Marchand flushed slightly, stiffened. 'Certainly *not*, monsieur. I should never betray my master's confidence.'

'Perhaps you're right there. But you must write your memoirs. I shall certainly write mine.'

'And will *you* tell the world about—this girl?'

'No, no—not for me. I shall tell the world about our long conversations during those few unforgettable days in Elba. My recollections will make most interesting reading.'

'I'm sure they will, monsieur.' Marchand's voice was non-committal.

'Meanwhile we've nothing to do but wait.'

'No, monsieur, except that I have the Emperor's uniform to press. I wonder, would that girl put on an iron for me?'

'I'll ask her, I've nothing to do.' Fleury drifted off into the kitchen. An iron was put on immediately.

The clash of the sentries' bayonets stirred the house to life.

'Dispatch from Marshal Grouchy!' shouted an unknown voice.

Fleury darted out. 'Hello!—what's the news?—where are you from?'

'Gembloux.'

'Is the Marshal *still* only there?'

'He was at six o'clock when I left. But he was just starting off for Walhain and so on to Wavre. We've all been badly held up by this frightful weather—no chaussée—only cart-tracks—manhandling the guns—the men are dead beat. Where's the Emperor?'

'Gone forward, you'll find him somewhere on the road. Where's Blücher?'

'One corps to Wavre probably—one gone north to Louvain. Other two—we don't know. I must get on—I've been four hours getting here—lost my way.'

Fleury went into the duty room and retailed his news, then fetched the hot iron for Marchand and repeated it again, and after a final repetition in the kitchen, stayed there, finding it both warm and friendly.

'What a chatterbox that young fellow is,' Bassano said severely. 'Doesn't he realize that we at least have work to do? Now, about that memorandum for Caulaincourt. . . .'

An orderly, with a horse on a leading-rein, rode up to the yard door and shouted for a groom. One came running. 'General Flahaut's horse has cast a shoe. Another horse for General Flahaut, please.'

The orderly, dismounting, went into the kitchen to wait.

'What's the news?' Fleury, of course.

'Oh, nothing much. The Emperor's ridden along the line, the infantry are mostly up now—except the Guard and

Lobau's corps and some of the heavy cavalry. The light cavalry is deployed. God, what a marvellous sight! Have you ever seen cavalry deploy, missy?"

'I've never seen—cavalry—at least not much—at all—only some of the English. But they were all so wet and dirty.'

That provoked a good laugh. The orderly expatiated on the kaleidoscope of colour—blue, crimson, green, white, gold—on the gleam of lances and accoutrements, the panache of plumed busbies—'Plumes a yard and a half high, missy.'

At length, Fleury cut in with, 'And where's *the Emperor* now?'

'Back on a little hillock near a place called Rossomme.'

'Oh, just round the corner,' Marie said, surprised.

'Exactly, just round the corner. As a matter of fact when I left, he was asleep.'

They all exclaimed in astonishment except Chandelier, who reproved them. 'He often has a sleep just before a battle. It means his mind is made up.'

'The staff are standing round trying to look solemn and dutiful. They brought him out a chair and table for the maps. And he promptly fell asleep. Of course, he had written the final battle orders *first*.'

'Precisely as I said.' Chandelier was complacent. 'Everything arranged. His mind at ease. Now, where can I get that mutton? You ought to know, missy, my dear.' Chandelier had in effect dismissed the orderly, who wandered out into the yard.

Fleury followed him to ask whether the messenger from Grouchy had arrived at Rossomme.

'Just come up when I left.' He sounded bored and Fleury left him and returned to the kitchen where Chandelier was still saying, 'The mutton—what about the mutton?'

Marie suggested the farm at Chantelet—about twenty minutes' walk through the wood. Chandelier would arrange for an officer and some soldiers to go and she must go too, to show them the way.

They got the mutton, after some haggling, and the officer

paid, and the soldiers carried it back hopeful of pleasing Chandelier. The chef sniffed and prodded and examined it from all angles and decided it 'would do'.

In the kitchen was an orderly, eating voraciously.

'Brandy!' he demanded, with his mouth full.

'*No brandy*,' Pierron replied severely. 'Beer if you like.'

'Oh—well—that'll do.'

Fleury was hanging over him, highly excited.

'But, Zenowicz, what did the Emperor *say*?"

'That I was to catch up with Grouchy and not leave him till his whole force has joined up on our right.'

'*No!*'

'Don't tell a soul—but that's what the Emperor *said*.'

'Wasn't Soult excited?'

'Not particularly. He didn't hear *that*, of course, and when I told him he said *he* had quite different instructions for the dispatch.' Zenowicz crammed more food into his mouth, muttered, 'Do you suppose the dispatch is ready? I ought to be off. I reckon I've got more than thirty miles to Walhain and I don't know the way after Gembloix—besides the going's still awful.'

Fleury went away, came back laughing. 'You've time for a snooze even; Soult's in the duty room looking at a map and his aide is mending a pen! They haven't begun the dispatch yet.'

'Sacred Name! How *like* Soult—hopeless as Chief of Staff—everyone says so; slow and muddled, never sends duplicates—too lazy I suppose. What's the betting that Grouchy won't understand it when I take it to him? Soult and he are dunderheads. Pity Berthier fell out of that window.'

At length the dispatch was ready and Zenowicz rode off. Fleury reported the exciting details of their conversation in the duty room.

'I don't believe a word of it,' Fain remarked. 'Zenowicz is an arrant liar—all Poles are.' He looked across at Marshal Soult who merely shrugged and commented quietly, 'The Emperor is *not* calling in Marshal Grouchy,' and added, 'I

only wish he were.' He put on his hat and, his aide following, went out.

The marching troops let them go by in silence.

'Do you notice *that*?' Fain said to Bassano.

'What can you expect?—Soult—Minister of War to Louis XVIII—the Bourbon? His proclamation to the army on 7th March called His Majesty the Emperor "an adventurer", issued on the very day the Emperor reached the defile of Laffray. The soldiers aren't *all* fools.' Bassano was unusually animated.

Fleury queried, 'Supposing Delessart's troops had fired on him, then, walking alone towards them his coat thrown open ready to receive their fire?'

'The 5th Regiment of the Line would have gone down through history as the most infamous regiment ever raised. It would have deserved to be *blotted out* of the muster rolls. What surprises *me* is that they have cheered Ney these last few days—after the iron-cage episode. I have no use for turncoats in *any* position whatever their capacity or their courage.'

Fain said respectfully, 'We all know *your* loyalty, mon-seigneur.'

'Equalled only by your own,' replied Bassano simply. 'It has always been our duty and honour to serve a great master.'

Fain nodded.

'But,' Fleury said gaily, 'he came with the violets, as the people believed he would.'

Bassano smiled. 'Yes, with the violets—harbingers of spring. Springtime for France again! A year of the Bourbons has been more than enough.'

'Vive le Caporal Violette!' exclaimed Fain.

The steady tramp of feet had been replaced by the clop of hoofs and the jingle of harness. Fleury went into the kitchen, asking permission to show Marie some *real* cavalry. The pages ran out in excitement, the kitchen boys followed.

It was a splendid sight.

'Kellermann's heavies, les gros talons,' Fleury explained. 'There's Kellermann, leading—that untidy man—he makes a habit of *that*. Aren't they wonderful? Big men, big horses.'

First came two regiments of dragoons: green tunics with red or yellow facings, white breeches, long boots, copper helmets over panther-skin turbans, long crests of horse-hair floating.

'What do they do?' Marie asked.

'Fight with carbine or pistol or sword, they're a kind of mounted infantryman.'

Two regiments of cuirassiers followed. They wore steel helmets with the floating crest and steel breastplates. Their tunics were dark blue with red or yellow facings and imposing gold fringed epaulettes.

Then, more resplendent than all, two regiments of carabiniers.

Marie marvelled. 'Aren't they *wonderful*? Their lovely white uniforms! Are those—things—on their chests really gold?'

'Breastplates? No—brass, but the sun makes them look like gold, doesn't it? Look at their helmets—like the heroes of antiquity—the real Grecian helmet with the red chenille crest.'

She didn't know what that meant, but was happy to watch and exclaim.

General Fouler and his junior equerries had come to observe too. They exchanged technical comments and appraisals. 'Unbeatable', was the verdict.

One said, after a while, 'The whole 3rd corps of cavalry, isn't it?'

'Undoubtedly; we've had fourteen regiments pass and there are still more coming up. Six thousand troopers at least. Something to be proud of.'

Returning to the kitchen, Chandelier was severe. 'You've been a very long time, missy. I needed you.'

Fleury called out, 'It's all my fault, monsieur. But missy has to have her education attended to.'

There was now the noise of gun-carriages rumbling past, the shouts and curses of drivers urging their teams along, but Marie had seen the whole corps of heavy cavalry and felt blasé about any other troops. How stupid of the Boucquéau family not to have come to watch too! Fancy moping upstairs when so many exciting things were happening! She felt indifferent to the damage to M. Boucquéau's property and the loss of Madame's linen since the Emperor had promised to pay for everything. He would keep his word—would—Bonaparte.

She whispered the name, softly, lingeringly. 'Bonaparte,' and Chandelier said, 'Hein?'

'Nothing, monsieur, nothing.'

ENGLISH INTERLUDE I

Green youth

Towards eleven o'clock on the morning of 18th June.

FREDERICK DASHWOOD SWANN, nineteen years old, Ensign 3rd Battalion, His Britannic Majesty's 1st Regiment of Foot Guards, was struggling to appear less miserable than he felt.

Common sense told him that a bath, a shave, a square meal and a good night's sleep—plus a dose of his mother's cordial for the beastly head-cold just starting and some other of her remedies for his blistered feet—would put all to rights. Meanwhile, he was miserable.

Life had been so pleasant till—er—Friday—or perhaps, Thursday evening. The fellows in the mess at H.Q. at Enghien were an agreeable crowd, though too much given to obscure regimental jokes and stories of the Peninsular campaign in which anyone who was anybody had had the most astonishing experiences. Spain, it seemed, was Hell at all seasons of the year, except when you were in a comfortable billet, lying in late, and with a black-eyed senorita to bring you delicious chocolate and crisp brown toast in bed.

There had been a certain depression in the mess at the thought of 'that boy', the Prince of Orange, as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces. Only the historically minded captain had found that quite natural and explained tediously about Dutch William and history always repeating itself. But nobody bothered to listen to him.

But when the news came that the Duke was to lead them. . . . That would be Fred's first campaign story for his mother.

It was after we had drunk the loyal toast, and lighted our cigars, Mamma, that Colonel Stuart said he had good news for us. Then he read out 'The Prince of Orange surrenders the command of the army into the

more able hands of His Grace, the Duke'—He got no further. Everyone was shouting and stamping with excitement. The Colonel sent for the R.S.M. (Regimental Sergeant Major, you know) and told him to tell the men. The R.S.M. absolutely straight-faced, said 'Sir'. (That's the correct answer in the Guards. The N.C.O.s and other ranks never say 'Yes' or 'No, sir'. Just—'Sir'. It's wonderful what inflections they can get into it.) Then the R.S.M. said, 'I think the men know already, sir.'

Someone threw up the window, and by Jove! the shouting and cheering! 'Nosey's to lead us! Hurrah! Old Nosey!' all that sort of thing (the Duke has a big nose, as you know, Mamma). The town was joining in the fun, girls dancing with our men and the men hugging any woman and pump-handling any man. The Belgies are a friendly lot, I must say. Everyone got drunk that night—even the sergeants' mess. Gin is so cheap you can get 'royal' as they say, for twopence. But the beer is disgusting—so what can they do?

Thus, the first campaign story. Fred's mind passed over the pleasant uneventful summer days, parades, reviews, routine work, going up to town to Brussels, to the funny little tailor to have his mess jacket adjusted (it was a thought too tight), to be ready for the ball the Duke was offering the officers of the Guards on the second anniversary of Vittoria. (That *should* have been next Wednesday—the mess jacket had probably been sent on to his lodgings in Enghien—would he *ever* need it?)

The second story started:

On Thursday evening, Colonel Stuart and Colonel Askew who commands our 2nd battalion had gone into Brussels for a grand ball at the Duchess of Richmond's. I wished I were there, and went early to bed because I was bored, and was wakened in the middle of the night by the bugles blowing 'Assembly'. (That's a very

penetrating call, Mamma, and it goes on and on.) I dashed into my clothes, the batman (soldier-servant, Mamma), I share with Ted Pardoe (I've told you about him, two months younger than me and already been on campaign and mentioned in dispatches. A nice chap. He's sure to get on)—Well, our batman packed my valise and took it to the baggage waggon and I went out hoping I hadn't left anything important behind. It was dark of course, except for the torches and the lights in the windows. All the townspeople were leaning out, shouting 'Vive les Anglais!' A very nice send-off! General Cooke, our divisional commander, and Maitland our Brigadier and the Colonels came dashing back from Brussels (they must have changed like lightning, because they were in campaign dress, in two twos). Maitland is such a nice chap—always so gay—and was as fresh as a daisy, in spite of having danced all night.

The 2nd brigade of our division from Ath was on our heels as we marched off at about four o'clock, sun just up, the day going to be a scorcher.

We got to Braine-le-Comte about nine o'clock and they let us have a break of three hours. We got something to eat, the men cooked, and afterwards changed camp kettles around—always a bit of good natured squabbling over that. (That was an idea of the Duke's in Spain. Small kettles for six men, to be carried by each man in turn. The old method was huge kettles on mules but the mules always got lost or ran away.)

Someone's A.D.C. passed us in Braine, riding hell-for-leather—still in satin breeches and dancing pumps.

Then we struck off across country. It was uncomfortable going amongst the wheat and rye which is taller than a man—quite extraordinary. The men, poor blighters (sorry, Mamma) were miserable in the heat with their heavy packs and their muskets, but no one complained—except in joke. The only one who was happy was the captain with his Dutch William stories. We were passing over the field of Steinkirk, he said, and

told a long story about the French officers, surprised in bed and having no time to tie their lace jabots, just pushing them through the top button-hole of their coats. And the French King's officers did *that* for ever after, it seems. Wasn't that very interesting? he said. We all grinned. Poor chap! The heat. . . .

We did about ten miles across fields, then struck a good wide road and got to Nivelles, a largish, good-looking town, crammed that day with horse artillery and baggage waggons and ammunition waggons and stores, and Belgian or perhaps Dutch cavalry not knowing whether it was coming or going. The whole town seemed to be in the streets; more 'Vive les Anglais!' The old women were praying for our safety and the small boys patting the horses. We were just piling arms, preparing for a halt, when the order came to move on at once. I longed for a wash, and a drink of water.

There was a sort of rumbling noise—dru-ub, dru-ub, in the distance. One of the men called out, 'Cor! Shakin' out the blankets!' and everyone laughed. I didn't understand, but the captain explained it was the men's usual term for cannon-fire. Rather appropriate you would think, Mamma, if you had ever heard it. We were looking awful by now, the men streaming with sweat, their shakos at all angles, and most of them had thrown away their black leather stocks. Someone said, 'The Duke won't mind what we look like, provided we arrive in time.' That sounded like business. I wondered whether we were going to save the day somewhere. I wished my feet weren't so damned (sorry Mamma) blistered. I felt I should never be able to charge or even trot.

After Nivelles, we met ambulance carts and walking wounded. . . .

The second campaign story broke off here abruptly. It had been Fred's first sight of blood-stained, maimed humanity. In spite of the blazing sun, he had yet felt suddenly deathly

cold and in a panic lest he might faint. Gradually the feeling passed. . . .

The third story began:

We came quite suddenly in on the right of a sort of scrimmage. The Prince of Orange, dressed up as a Cherry Picker (the 10th Hussars, Mamma, they have crimson facings to their uniforms) but with a General's hat—he looked very odd—came riding up, with his A.D.C. and gave orders to us. Lord Saltoun (he's one of our Lieutenant-Colonels) dashed ahead, with the light companies, bayonets fixed, tearing after him. They disappeared into a wood, just off the road. Everyone else seemed to know what to do. I just copied them. We officers drew our swords, the men had their muskets at the port (held diagonally across the chest, Mamma, one more movement and they are ready to fire) and began to trot. I trotted too. My feet were awful. We all milled about in the wood.

Dick Master and Jim Butler had unfurled the colours, Dick carried the King's and Jim the Regimental. (Oh yes, different to look at, the King's is a large Jack with a fancy centre, the Regimental has a laurel wreath and the battle honours on scroll work and a small Jack at the top corner, close to the staff.) After a time, about an hour I should think (When did this start? Late afternoon I should think—I didn't look at my watch—yes, it keeps splendid time), we got through the wood on to a road. There were French about, cavalry, cuirassiers, someone said—heavies.

The Duke was everywhere at once on that splendid chestnut (Copenhagen, you remember, Mamma, you *must* have heard of Copenhagen) cool as a cucumber—giving orders, leading men about, encouraging the Brunswickers. (They black their faces for fighting and look very fierce, but they are only boys really—it's a shame to use them so young. Their Duke was killed quite early on, so I heard.)

I saw old Sir Thomas Picton (looks rather like the pictures of Russian Cossacks) in a frightful old civilian frock and old beaver hat. He hardly ever opens his mouth except to swear, they say.

The gay Gordons were doing marvels (Highlanders, Mamma).

Then Dick and Jim came back with the colours from somewhere, looking uncommonly solemn. Poor Captain Miller had asked to see them again before they took him away—terribly wounded. . . .

The story halted again. That incident had been heart-breaking, and poor Sam Barrington too, shot dead, and the Gordons had lost their beloved Colonel, Cameron of Lochiel, and the cold feeling had come on again only worse. Men were dying, men were dead, some at his feet, on that blistering hot road.

The next instalment opened cheerfully:

Suddenly it was getting dark, the Frogs seemed (oh, the French, Mamma) to have gone off somewhere and the battle was over.

I really hadn't done anything but slash about with my sword at nobody in particular. I was so tired, *we* were so tired—that most of us flopped down hoping to sleep for hours. The men boiled up their kettles with their oatmeal ration to make a stirabout. One of them very kindly offered me some, but I was so dry with thirst I had to refuse, and I was sorry, for he looked quite crestfallen.

I slept a bit but then 'Bacchus' Lascelles and 'Bull' Townshend and Newton Chambers of ours (he's rather a swell. His father, George Chambers, is a nobody, but his mother's a daughter of the great Lord Rodney) who was A.D.C. to Picton, and had come visiting from the bivouac of the 5th division to have a chin-wag, started talking about Picton.

'Very quiet all day,' said Bacchus.

Chambers agreed, said Picton had been wounded, but wouldn't admit to it. His side, ribs crushed or something.

Bull said: 'I heard him shout "28th! Remember Egypt!" when they were in a tight place and when they had retaken the position, "If I live to see the Prince Regent, I shall tell him how well you did today" and never an oath to it.'

Chambers remarked that he thought Picton was feeling very ill—'Poor old Picton!' they said and then started discussing a queer card of the 1st battalion, a fellow named Gronow.

Chambers had a tale of how Gronow had extracted a promise from Picton to take him on as A.D.C. if Chambers or Tyler were killed. (He ought to have been waiting to go on guard duty at St. James's. He hadn't even bothered to get leave to come over. Just chanced the campaign being finished before his week on duty.) Gronow had turned up early in the day on a superb horse, *with* a groom.

Chambers said: 'He rode up to Colonel Thomas as cool as you please and announced himself. He was soon off his high horse—in every sense. "Get off and explain," said Thomas. "I'll have you put under arrest. You've no business here. Your battalion is in England." Well, Gunthorpe (the adjutant, Mamma) took Gronow's part and said, "You shall go with Captain Clements' company to a little place called Waterloo near Brussels in charge of prisoners. But you'll have to go as a volunteer Guardsman and you had better get rid of that horse."'

'How about his spurs?' said Bacchus laughing.

'Spurs to a gallant youth are things of course. To make folks fancy he has got a —— horse,' Bull said. (That's from a poem some chap wrote in Spain. They say he may be going to publish it.)

Chambers went on about how Sir John Byng's A.D.C. (Sir John commanded the 2nd brigade, Mamma,

the Coldstream and the 3rd Foot Guards) bought the horse and Gronow marched off (I suppose towards Brussels) with the prisoners.

‘*And the spurs?*’ Bull said. ‘Uncomfortable for a long walk.’

They all laughed at that. ‘I wonder if it will take the shine out of him?’ said Bacchus.

‘Not a bit,’ said Chambers. ‘He’ll turn up to join you in the 3rd battalion as though straight out of a bandbox. You wait!’

‘Nothing puts Gronow about,’ Bull said. ‘He can do any damn’ thing and not disturb the points of his shirt collar.’

‘Comes of his royal descent,’ said Chambers.

Bull said, ‘Gad! I didn’t know that—who?—the Duke of York?’

‘Lord, no! Ages back. Tudors or something. He quarters the leopards of England on his ’scutcheon. He’ll tell you it—in just those words.’

They went on talking and smoking, and I dozed a bit and woke up hearing horses’ hoofs and harness jangling. ‘Cavalry coming up,’ said Bacchus.

‘Time too,’ said Bull. ‘We could have done with them before.’

I must have slept again, for it was getting light when I heard Chambers say, ‘Well, I must be off. Gronow may get his chance yet. Tyler or me—you never know.’

He was laughing like anything as he went away.

The next day had been dull. No story in it. The position was crowded with troops. Masses of cavalry, light and heavy, had arrived. ‘Assembly’ had sounded very early. The Duke had ridden up, freshly shaved and dapper, with Cooke and Maitland. Picton followed, looking very pale and grim. *They* had all had a good supper and beds at an inn and breakfast at dawn by the roadside. There was cold pie, as always, for the regimental officers, and

cold water to drink. Fred felt filthy. He had a palpable beard and hadn't washed his face or hands since Thursday evening and now it was—er—Saturday morning. He had asked, somewhat diffidently, what the place was called. *Quatre Bras*—simplified by the men to *Quarter Brass*.

It seemed the Duke expected to fight again here. He had ridden about, glass often to his eye. Then dispatches had come from England and some newspapers and he had sat down on the grass to read them and presently lay back with the *Morning Chronicle* over his face and went to sleep. Fred had thought this very odd, but no one else did.

'Nosey always knows what he's up to!'

Then a Prussian officer rode over from Blücher's position. The Prussians had also had a battle yesterday, away to the left, and that seemed to change the Duke's plans at once. The Guards and the rest of the infantry were ordered to form up and at about ten o'clock began to march off.

No battle! Retreating! How awful! Nobody minded *that* either. 'Nosey always . . .' was the reply to Fred's anxious questions. 'Blucher has had a damn' good licking and retreated north, so we've got to go back too.'

The Guards had been passed through Alten's division in haste. The Germans, King's Legion and Hanoverians, stood aside for them in polite silence, but the English Line regiments had jeered a bit. 'The dear little Guards *must* be taken care of.'

'The precious babes mustn't be allowed to get killed,' and so on.

The Scots in the regiment had marched in haughty silence, eyes front, the English had scowled and muttered imprecations on the damned Three Tens, the so-and-so Havercake Lads and the bloody Ups and Downs. The Irishmen were spoiling for a fight. But discipline kept every man in the ranks and they passed their tormentors without incident.

Fred, puzzled by the odd names, forebore to ask the

captain, for fear of long historical digressions. It was too swelteringly hot for that.

They had marched all morning by the turnpike road, then by a long, narrow street through a village and so out on to the broad road again, white with dust, blazingly, pitilessly bare of shade, up hill and down dale, occasionally passing prosperous farms or isolated cottages till, leaving an extremely handsome farmhouse with a large high-walled orchard on their left, they turned left at a crossroads into what was merely a wide rutted cart track, and after about half a mile were ordered to pile arms and bivouac just behind the track.

A slight ridge rose before them, hiding the country through which they had just passed. By mounting the ridge, the white ribbon of the pike and the long columns winding along it towards them, were in full view. The whole expanse of the undulating shallow valley, with its fields of corn and rye and clover, lay spread out like a map, quivering in the sultry heat.

The sky had been looking very black for some time and they had hardly settled down, and the men had just got the kettles on the boil, when the storm burst.

The next chapter of Fred's story opened:

I can't describe that storm, Mamma. It was simply terrific. Thunder, lightning and torrents of rain. Men who had been in India had seen nothing like it. It went on all evening, all night, till—oh, long after dawn, though we never *saw* the dawn, of course. No, there was nowhere to shelter. The baggage and the servants didn't come up, so we got no supper. I tried to look as though I didn't care a jot. The old standing dishes (old soldiers, Mamma) were saying, 'D'you remember the retreat to Burgos?' or 'The crossing of the Bidassoa?' and so forth. The 'Babe' (that's *young* Lascelles—no, no relation to Bacchus—Babe is the Harewood family) got chaffed for complaining. Someone said 'What *should* we have done with your poor dear carcase in the Pyrenees?'

Dick Master and I spread his boat-cloak and lay on it and pulled mine over us (they're oil-skin, Mamma). But it wasn't much good. It just got covered with pools of water. The water poured on to our faces and ran down our necks all night. We were soaked. I tried to doze, but Dick was in a panic for fear a Frog would creep up and steal the King's Colour which he was cuddling in its waterproof case.

The old hands rolled themselves in their cloaks and crept *into* the ground—or so it seemed. Some were under bits of hedge—but not really sheltered.

Captain Burgess rigged up a tent with blankets held up by a sergeant's halberd and two muskets. He was quite snug, he said.

Bull had an umbrella (another tip from Spain) and he and Bacchus sat under it, one on either side of the stick, talking and smoking all night. I rather enjoyed their reminiscing. . . .

But Mamma wouldn't understand, so he would leave that out, but it was amusing to think of the stories now—in daylight.

' . . . Nuns showering us with rose petals at Zamora in '13 . . . Villagers all turned out, thumping tambourines . . . Billiard table in that monastery—that was a find! . . . '11 was the year of the comet, my dear fellow, because it's the '12 claret which is going to be superb . . . How the men loved the donkey races, back to fore, with a bunch of carrots to encourage the moke . . . And chasing a greasy pig . . . Tea with the Archbishop. They threw away the water and brought us the leaves to eat!'

' . . . Hunting was good for the liver—but d'you remember any kills? . . . The Light Div. were enterprising fellows. 'Member their hunt, fifteen couples or so of —— hounds! Yes, poodles, sheep-dogs, curs, any dog but the right one. That captain in the 95th gave a dollar a dog. *And* when the hunt started each dog ran home howling . . . 'Member the 95th putting on *The Rivals*? Lydia Languish and Julia

drinking punch and smoking cigars in the green room! . . . They looked *somewhat* feminine *on* the stage. Nosey rode twelve miles over awful roads to see the play. . . . And rode back afterwards to H.Q. . . . And there was Nosey's dinner and ball—two hundred and fifty people—forty or fifty women, even—March '13 wasn't it? . . . It was. When Lowry Cole got the Bath and Nosey was made Duke of . . . wherever it was. I can't keep up with Nosey's dukedoms.'

From some hole in the ground, the knowledgeable captain had chipped in with 'Ciudad Rodrigo.'

The two men had ignored him, went on talking together.

' . . . Nosey rode seventeen miles that evening, danced, stayed till supper and went off home at half past three in the morning . . . And when the Spaniards and their ladies had gone, we chaired the Prince of Orange and Vandeleur and dropped Van. 'Member? . . . And we taught the Spaniards Hip! Hip! Hip! Hooray! *that* night . . . By Jove! *Those* were the days! . . .'

Fred thought he might as well tell his mother about that captain coming up and putting a stop to the reminiscences. . . .

He had his *own* campaign stories, Mamma, something about a Church service on the sands at St. Jean-de-Luz in pouring rain with the Duke in full dress as a Field Marshal. (He had just got that step up after the victory at Vittoria, the captain said, two years ago—just.) Then he had an involved story about a play called *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* at Bordeaux, put on by the French and a song *O Richard! O mon Roi, l'univers t'abandonne* and something about Queen Marie Antoinette and the French King's Guards at Versailles—long ago in '89. I didn't understand and the other two were bored. They said they found the French a dull, stand-offish crowd after the Spaniards. Then they yawned and pretended to be very sleepy and the captain went off.

Occasionally Robin Adair would get up and dance in his cloak to get warm, singing some nonsensical verses, all ending:

When, squadrons square,
We'll all be there,
To meet the French in the mor—ning!

Pardoe came and joined in and they waltzed together. You would have laughed, Mamma. But you can imagine I didn't get any real sleep that night. It rained all the time and was simply frightful. But the men were even worse off. They had to sit on their knapsacks all night to keep their powder dry. Some of them had blankets, but most of them had nothing to protect them. Their greatcoats were in England because this was a summer campaign.

Dick and I rolled out at reveille, stiff as boards. It was still dark and, of course, pouring, and the pools of water on my cloak drenched us. I was positively shaking water out of my sleeves. Then there was Assembly and we stood to arms for hours, it seemed. Just regulation ritual, someone told me. Stand to for surprise attack till your outposts come in. I hadn't realized we had outposts but didn't say so.

After a long time the day seemed lighter but everything was smothered in fog. You couldn't see a thing in any direction, only there was the sound of musket fire. I thought it was the surprise, but it was only the whole line discharging to clear damp powder.

When the outposts came in, through the fog, their captain said he had had a very pleasant chat with his Frog opposite number. Frog said France was sick of war and hoped this would be the end. But, he had added *they* meant to win this battle and sleep in Brussels that night. Our captain had said 'Well, perhaps,' and they left it at that.

Then the roll was called and after that the men were stood down—they got fires going even with green and sodden sticks (any old Peninsular man can make a fire, they say), and the stirabout was brewing again. I got a bit of cold pie and some not very good claret from

Bacchus, who told me all about his horse Bucephalus and fox-hunting in Spain. 'The Duke's the straightest rider to hounds *I* ever saw. Took a tumble as cheerfully as the next man. He'll break his neck one day. Kept a good pack, too, and wore the sky blue of the Hatfield Hunt. Lady Salisbury had the coat made for him. Great sight!'

The fog lifted a little, we began to be able to see our neighbours and our own guns on the crest ahead of us. A horse battery and a foot battery, six guns to each—or rather, I should say, Mamma, to be accurate, five guns each and a howitzer. (A howitzer throws a high angle shell.) There were all sorts of noises, people practising on the trumpet, bagpipes in the rear. I asked the quartermaster (he was a Scotchman) and he said it must be the 71st's pipers, playing 'Bundle and Go'. 'The Pig and Whistlers only know three tunes,' he said. ' "Johnny Cope" is the favourite—their quick step—the other I forgot for the moment.'

A private cut his hand, hacking firewood. Mr. Gilder, one of the assistant surgeons, tied it up. 'First blood,' he said, quite cheerfully.

There was a lot of noise coming from the Frogs with bugles and trumpets and bands. All this time, the day was clearing. We found that we, on our ridge, were almost parallel to the Frogs on another to the south. The road we had come up yesterday, the Charleroi-Brussels pike, our centre, on our battalion's left, ran down from our line, through the hollow and up the other side to the centre of the Frogs' position. We seemed to be set in an almost straight line, but we couldn't yet see farther to the left than the crossroads. Our neighbours between it and us were Alten's division, and Halkett's brigade was nearest to us, those Line regiments who had jeered at us the day before. On our right we had our 2nd brigade. My battalion was supposed to be in advance of the 2nd battalion, but everyone was mixed up, milling around doing odd jobs, keeping the fires going to dry

clothes and cleaning accoutrements. The men's shakos were just sodden puddings with the white cords hanging loose. They looked comical. But the Colonel didn't mind. Muskets dry, that was the thing that mattered. . . .

And then that bounder Gronow turned up. Everyone was shouting greetings.

'Come and tell us the London news!'

'Have you been to Almack's lately?'

'How's Lady Cowper?'

Lord Saltoun, who was eating cold pie and drinking champagne (it's very cheap in Brussels, Mamma) with Burgess in his tent (Burgess's servant had come up with the prog and the drink), collared Gronow and they had a great chin-wag.

After a time we heard cheering from the left. Gronow said knowingly, 'Ah, ha! the Duke! I passed him and all his big-wigs drinking tea with Barnard's Sweeps!'

You may well ask what *that* meant, Mamma. Someone told me later that the Sweeps are the Rifle Corps because of their dark green uniform and black accoutrements. A crack regiment—quite new—with a rifle which is quite different from a musket, slender, lighter, easier to handle.

Gronow kept everyone guessing for a bit then he explained that General Barnard had spent the night in a cottage on the main road from that place Waterloo (it wasn't on any of the maps, they said), where the Duke and the other nobs had spent the night.

In the morning his Sweeps had made a fire and boiled a huge kettle of tea with *milk and sugar* just by the cottage and were offering it to everyone who passed.

The noise of the cheering got the men busy with the fires. 'Fire for Nosey,' they said.

'Nosey feels the cold. He'll be glad of a bit of fire this nasty morning.'

One of them said, 'D'you 'member "32nd will you favour me with a little fire?"' They all laughed. Another

old Peninsular joke, I suppose, but someone said it wasn't the 32nd. . . .

I liked listening to their opinions of the Duke. 'Nosey's always polite,' they said, 'a bit stiff—but polite—provided you behave yourself proper.'

The cheers grew louder. The men fell in and stood to attention. Dick and Jim with the Colours stood in front and all the officers—me too—with them, with drawn swords at the salute.

The Duke came riding slowly from the left, on that splendid charger. He had a lot of people with him, staff and foreign officers, but I looked hard at him to fix him in my mind. His grey eyes (they really are eagle eyes, light and piercing) seemed to be taking us all in at a single glance. He was very plainly dressed in a blue frock with a caped cloak over it, white doeskin pantaloons and Hessian boots with tassels, his sword on a belt, no sash that I could see and his low crowned black hat had four cockades. I had to ask the captain afterwards about those. The black cockade of England, the others, the Allies, Holland, Spain, and Portugal. He wanted to explain all about Spain and Portugal, but I sheered off.

When the Duke had spoken to Maitland and the Colonel he looked at the men and said very quietly, 'Well, my boys. I expect the Guards to do its duty by setting an example to the army today. I wish you good morning.' That was all, but the Colonel gave them a signal and they were cheering their heads off. The Duke touched his hat and his whole crowd rode on round the position.

Gronow was being knowledgeable about the retinue, but I didn't care. I had seen the Duke—just twenty paces away. That was all I wanted.

The sky was light now, the fog had lifted and we could see the Frogs marching into position on the other side of the valley, only about a thousand yards away. (Only a thousand yards! Think of it, Mamma!)

Suddenly someone shouted, excitedly, his glass to his eye, 'There's Boney!'

All glasses were up. (Mine didn't focus.) It *was* Boney, on his white horse. He was riding down the road, past a largish farmhouse and at the bottom of the slope he turned left along his own line of troops, all the time coming nearer to us. We heard them cheering, quite clearly, a wild, excited noise, not like British cheering at all. Just '*Vive l'Empereur!*' over and over again. . . .

The story would not include Fred's sudden wild fantasy: to dash forward, alone, with his sword drawn, strike down Boney, who had been a nuisance to England since before he, Fred, was born, and end the campaign just like that! Oddly enough, following his own thoughts, someone had said, 'If only Sandham's men could lay their guns on him!'

Colonel Stuart had answered sharply: 'Most improper. The Duke would deprecate *most* strongly any attempt to kill the Commander-in-Chief opposing us.'

That was something for Fred to think over.

The story went on:

The excitement over Boney died down after a bit and we were watching his guns coming into line. There was a great battery, seventy, eighty guns, the old hands said, trained on our left, beyond the crossroads, where Picton's division was.

Colonel Stuart said, 'Bonaparte is an artillery officer. He knows the value of guns.'

'He must have *twice* the number of ours,' someone said.

'Maybe,' said the Colonel, as cool as you please, 'but we have other advantages.'

Everybody seemed quite easy. Officers were walking back and forth, visiting their neighbours. Sir John Byng strolled over from the 2nd brigade and laid a bet with Lord Saltoun that, whenever the campaign ended, he

would shave off his beard in one minute. Lord Saltoun, who had a fine dark one already, took him on. I wondered why the battle didn't begin. Like a fool, I asked. That learned captain heard me and I got a flood of details of past campaigns, beginning with the Greeks and going on to Julius Caesar and so on. People passing grinned. I was properly cornered. . . .

So the story, coming up to date, must wait upon future events for further chapters. The sky had cleared considerably and there was a little warmth in the watery sunshine. Fred, fought with his misery, sneezing sometimes (this head cold was going to be a horror), feeling his clothes clammy, smelling himself sweaty, hating that . . . and everything else . . . and nearly everybody. . . .

The Colonel called his junior officers to him, bade them open their glasses. He wished to explain the layout of the battlefield.

He spoke well and simply. Bonaparte's line was slightly convex, his troops spread like an opened fan, infantry along the whole of the front line, supported by cavalry behind, heavies for the most part. . . . 'You can see their breastplates glinting.'

He indicated more infantry, in solid columns, near to the Brussels pike, 'which is as it were the central stick of the fan. Lancers—you can see their pennants fluttering, on both the extreme left and the extreme right. Light, easily manœuvrable cavalry, very valuable. Behind—we can barely see them, but concentrate your glasses—there are still more infantry, close to the road, in squares of battalions. Bonaparte's whole position is massively protected by the artillery on the ridge. That is his most formidable weapon. At a rough guess, Bonaparte has three hundred guns, many, so far as I can see, of heavy calibre.'

The young men murmured supposedly intelligent comments. Fred was silent. His glass was still difficult to focus.

‘And our position,’ the Colonel continued, ‘this ridge with its three forward posts, is like a toasting fork.’

Someone laughed, was quickly suppressed by a stern glance.

‘A toasting fork is a very apt simile. The three prongs—look to your left, gentlemen, the forward posts, those farms, Papelotte and La Haye they are called, slightly on the downward slope more than a mile away from us, are the first prong. The second, the centre—immediately on the west of the Brussels pike—*this* side of the pike is west, I would remind you, is that large farm La Haye Sainte, which we passed on our march yesterday, the vital point in our whole line I should say. And now, almost due south of us here—you will remark that our line follows the ridge and that the ridge curves from due west to south-west on our right—that large country house and garden, Hougoumont, is the third prong. It is now a defensive position of considerable strength; the engineers have done some work on it since we took up position here. It is about a quarter of a mile from us and we are almost half a mile from the Brussels pike. The army is ranged upon just the sort of position His Grace prefers. Any of you who have fought in Spain will know what I mean. . . .’

‘Rather like Busaco,’ someone hazarded and added hastily, ‘I imagine.’

The Colonel agreed, true up to a point, then said, ‘Aligned here, we shall oblige Bonaparte to fight our kind of battle, a thing which any commander avoids if it is humanly possible. We have only to wait.’

‘But supposing . . . ?’ Fred said, and stopped, blushing.

‘Yes, Mr. Swann?’

‘Supposing—Bonaparte—waits for *us* to attack him?’

The Colonel smiled. ‘Bonaparte is too impatient to fight a defensive battle. Besides, the Prussians are at Wavre, only twelve miles east of our left, and should join up with us any time now. *We* wish to *gain* time. Bonaparte has all to win by a rapid attack.’

Someone said, ‘I wish we could do without the er—um—Prussians.’

And another, 'I wonder whether Boney realizes all this?'

Colonel Stuart, relaxed, smiled, 'Most of it, my dear boy, you may be sure. He is the supreme master of his own method—attack. But that is not the *only* way to win a victory.'

'Anyway,' Fred said eagerly. 'We shall have a splendid view of it all from here.'

The Colonel smiled quizzically. 'You will be lucky if you see beyond the end of your nose, my dear boy.'

Fred, scarlet, thought savagely: Greenhorn! *Why* can't I keep my mouth shut! . . .

The air was cut by three sharp reports. White puffs of smoke from the mouths of three French guns marked their origin. Someone said, 'Gad! The first quadrille! May I have the pleasure? . . .'

The Colonel, looking at his watch, said 'Half past eleven. Synchronize your watches with mine, if you please, gentlemen.'

'Sir! *One* o'clock, sir.' Fred was determined to be right for once.

The Colonel repeated, gently, 'Half past eleven.'

A mocking voice behind Fred said, 'Every officer must provide himself with a reliable timepiece.'

Fred swung round. Acting Guardsman Gronow was smiling sweetly at him.

'It *is* reliable. It's a Barwise. My mother gave it to me, specially. . . .'

'But did not that dear lady' (a carefully assumed Welsh accent added to the maddening condescension) 'tell you that you must wind it regularly, my dear boy?'

Fred turned away, scowling. The watch had stopped of course. He put it right, furtively, wound it with nonchalance.

The heavens split with the opening roar of the great battery of French guns trained on the English left.

A Cockney voice in the ranks behind Fred said, 'Cor' blimey! They aren't 'alf shiakin' out them blankits!'

And an Irish one, mock-miserable. 'By Jasus, but I want to go *home!*'

'It's a long way to Tipperary, Paddy.' A Scotch rejoinder.

'For sure, but that's where me heart is, wid me Kitty.'

An officer commented, 'Ah—ha! Boney's *belles filles*.'

Fred dared to ask who they were. 'Twelve pounders, my dear fellow. Terrific!'

The battalion formed square, front rank kneeling on the right knee, second rank crouched, bayonets fixed, in the charge position, the third, erect, arms ported. . . .

A cannon ball ploughed through the third rank, taking a man's head with it. Fred felt deathly sick. Comrades removed the bleeding trunk.

In front of the square, Dick and Jim were standing rigidly to attention, with the Colours, swaying in the light breeze. Their brilliant red and blue and gold were touched by a chance gleam of sunlight.

After a few heavy discharges from the French batteries, the Colonel, mounted, rode to face his battalion. A bugle sounded and another from the 2nd battalion also in square, placed chequerwise a little to the right and behind the 3rd. Together, the two battalions, nearly two thousand men moving as one, flung themselves face down in the tall rye.

Fred, bewildered, hesitated.

'You too, Mr. Swann,' said the Colonel. 'Order to lie down has sounded.'

Fred, prone, seeing nothing, stunned by the thunderous cannonade and their own guns barking in reply thought: God! What a way to fight a battle!

Beside him lay a burly sergeant with grizzled hair and leather-tanned face, known to the battalion simply as 'George'. For a few minutes they lay in silence. Then Fred, pretending nonchalance, 'You're used to this, George?'

'Sir. Twenty years, sir.'

'In the Guards all the time?'

'Sir. No, sir. Listed in the 33rd, sir. A Havercake Lad.'

Fought 'ere in '94 with the Dook, Colonel Wesley then, sir.
Then India, that Tippoo, Singerpatum.'

Fred thought: Wherever? Oh, Seringapatam and said,
'Always with—the Duke?'

'Sir. Yes, sir. Colonel of the Regiment till—'o2 it must have been. Major-General then, sir, and Sir Arty—changed his name to Wellesley, then. Sad when he went home—in '05, I think it were. Then—o'courst, Spain in '12—I had transferred to the Guards by then, sir, Vittorier! Cor' blimey! Beg pardon, sir.'

'So—you're—used to this sort of noise?'

'Sir. Middlin' well, sir. Stirs the guts a bit though, don't it, sir?'

Fred smiled wanly, said, 'Ye—s.'

They were silent again.

Then the sergeant with a burst of pride. 'Sir! A great life, sir. Never say won't or can't or don't know 'ow—that's the way, sir.'

Fred felt himself flinching at every ear-splitting discharge. He burst out with: 'Why didn't they teach us something—beforehand? . . . Why didn't they tell us . . .' then choked and was silent.

Presently he felt the sergeant looking at him side-long, pityingly. Oh, for God's sake, *not* pityingly.

Kindly as a father the man said, 'Sir. Take it easy, sir. You'll get used to it after a bit, sir. Regular old soldier, sir. That's what you'll be—sir.'

Fred tried to smile again. Oh God, he thought, he sees I'm shaking, he thinks I'm afraid. But I'm not, *I'm not*. . . . But . . . there are Dick and Jim, white as ghosts, holding up the Colours and the Colonel on horseback and the senior officers strolling up and down . . . and—and . . .

From behind came Gronow's voice quoting softly:

'Had he but his will,
He'd sooner retail figs on Ludgate Hill . . .'

Ensign Swann, hiding in a cornfield, had throat and lips too

dry for speech, heart thumping too fiercely for adequate rejoinder.

He thought: why was that doggerel ever written to plague a man facing the boundless and eternal misery of being horribly afraid? . . .

PART 4

Grouchy?—or the Prussians?

‘This morning we had ninety chances in our favour. We still have sixty to forty. And if Grouchy . . . marches rapidly, the victory will be the more decisive, for Bülow’s corps will be entirely destroyed.’

Napoleon to Soult at La Belle Alliance at about two o’clock on the afternoon of 18th June.

THE background noise of feet was cut sharply by three single cannon shots. The clock struck half past eleven.

Everyone in the kitchen stood stock-still, listening. Fleury came in. 'Les trois coups de théâtre,' he said dramatically.

A rumbling, rushing noise of gunfire followed. 'Curtain's gone up,' he said. 'I wonder if I can see anything from the orchard wall?' and ran out into the yard.

Marie was excited, but also a little frightened.

Chandelier, preparing a midday snack 'for the gentlemen', reassured her. 'Just the beginning of the battle, missy. The noise of our own guns. Don't . . .'

The heavens opened with a thunderous roar, the ground shivered, the house rocked, a piece of the kitchen ceiling fell—crash!—on the tiled floor. Marie screamed. The boys yelped. One burst into tears.

'My God!' said Pierron.

Outside, the grooms and coachmen were running down the orchard, shouting. The pages charged through the kitchen, and the boys there, suddenly recovered, raced after them. The shattering, crackling roar went on, more ceiling fell, upstairs the shutters clacked to and fro as in a great storm.

Marie, her face in her hands, was sobbing. Chandelier recovered quickly. 'It's only the great battery of the Guard, missy, my dear. Eighty guns all firing at once. They must be very near us. But they're firing *at* the English. We've nothing to fear—nothing to fear. . . .' He repeated more slowly ' . . . Nothing to fear.'

Pierron also was calm now. 'Of course, how stupid of us. Nothing to fear. Now, missy, you've been so brave. . . '

The family of Boucquéau trooped into the kitchen. Young Madame was screaming of course. Sylvie wanted some sweetmeats and got them.

Chandelier did his best to reassure them.

Pierron, petting the child, said, 'A dear little thing—so good and quiet,' and gave the child's mother a scornful glance.

Fleury passing through to the front of the house reported there was nothing to be seen but billowing smoke and occasionally the flashes of the English guns on the farther hillside. 'They're only about two miles away,' he remarked cheerfully.

That didn't help the Boucquéaus.

Chandelier suggested they might like to have some lunch *upstairs*. He would gladly prepare it for them. There was some very good chicken stew. Young Madame screamed the louder. What inhumanity—to talk of *food* when they all might be killed at any moment. A piece of the ceiling fell on the table to emphasize her point.

The Boucquéau men were whispering in a corner with the old lady. They announced to young Madame that they would all go away again—to a relative at Couture St. Germain. They would be quite safe there. It was quickly decided. They inquired, perfunctorily, whether Marie would come too and were met by her firm refusal.

Young Madame rounded on her, 'Just like you—stupid and stubborn—you with your *beautiful* eyes and your *beautiful* chestnut curls! I suppose you think you've caught the fancy of some young gentleman of title who will make you a *lady*. . . .' Marie stood quietly as the torrent of words flooded over her.

From the door of the duty room, Fain commanded silence. M. de Bassano was writing.

The family departed hastily.

'Good riddance!' said Chandelier. 'We can't do with that nonsense here. . . '

Pierron gave Marie an approving pat. 'You're a brave girl, my dear. I thought you might want to go with them.

But we'll take care of you—don't you be afraid. Now come and help me. . . .

But not yet. Fleury dashed into the house, yelling, 'The Guard! The Guard are coming!'

At once, pandemonium.

'The Guard!'

'The Guard!'

'THE GUARD!'

Kitchen boys and pages, pell-mell, helter-skelter, footmen, grooms, farriers, saddlers, coachmen, Chandelier, a ladle in his hand, Pierron clutching a handful of forks and a cleaning cloth, Fleury dragging Marie, 'Come, on girl, the sight of all the ages,' Marchand with a clothes-brush, Dr. Larrey with his surgeons, his chemists, his medical orderlies, Captain Coignet, General Fouler, his assistant equerries outdistancing him, General Radet, Provost Grand-Marshal and a posse of his police, Authéry, Dr. Percy, lumbering along, the Portfolio with his inevitable green case, Fain, and finally, trying to maintain a semblance of dignity and calm, Monseigneur le Duc de Bassano.

Already the troops were level with the farmhouse. The sentries stood to attention, arms presented. Lieutenant-General Comte Duhesme, riding a black stallion, saluted the tricolour above the Imperial Headquarters with his drawn sword. Behind him, a band, marching on foot, played 'Veillons au salut de l'Empire'.

The division, sharpshooters and skirmishers, young, slender men in blue coats and trousers, red epaulettes, and red pompoms to their shakos, or green epaulettes and green pompoms, marched lightly but firmly, perfectly accoutred, in perfect alignment.

'Vive !a Jeune Garde!'

'La Jeune Garde!'

Rank upon rank, seemingly endless.

'However many?' murmured Marie and then a little disappointed. 'Trousers!'

'Yes, campaign dress—don't talk, just look—look. . . .' Fleury was abrupt.

'Eight battalions,' Fouler whispered to her. That meant very little until he added, 'More than four thousand men.'

To these succeeded older men, in similar dark blue uniforms, but with tall fur caps.

The watching crowd roared their welcome: 'Vive les Chasseurs!'

'Vive les Chasseurs de la Garde!'

In the orchard a shouted command, the crash of arms presented.

'Their comrades salute them,' murmured Dr. Larrey. The applause never ceased. A famous veteran recognized, got a personal welcome, a shout of his battle honours.

'Vive Cambronne!'

'Cambronne! Jena! Jena!'

'Vive Pelet!'

'Pelet!'

'Le Grand Pelet!'

'Arcis-sur-Aube!'

'Pelet! Montmirail!'

Marie, excited and dazed, looked round her; from M. de Bassano to Captain Coignet, from the pompous Pierron to Jean Horn, the Emperor's coachman, from Dr. Larrey back to Fleury, still gripping her arm fiercely. Besides cheering, they were all near to weeping.

'Eight battalions of Chasseurs,' Fouler said gruffly. 'We've seen ten thousand men already.'

'But now . . . now . . .' Fleury gulped, incoherent.

A gap in the solid phalanxes. . . .

The trees at the corner of the farm hid the approaching column. People blew their noses, surreptitiously wiped their eyes. Then, two officers, riding alone, tall men, splendid in blue tail coats with white facings and lavish gold braiding, gold shoulder knots, brilliant silk sashes, gold fringed, great bearskin caps with tall red plumes, came on at a foot's pace. Their drawn swords flashed in salute at sight of the tricolour. Their horses stepped proudly as if conscious of their own beauty, the splendour of their embroidered saddle cloths and bronze-studded trappings.

An avalanche of cheering broke out. 'Friant! Friant!'
And battle honours, 'Austerlitz! Auerstädt! Wagram!'
And for his companion, 'Roguet! Roguet!'

And, 'Le Vieux de la Vieille!' and a string of place names stretching across Europe from Marengo and Ulm to Moscow and back to Montmirail.

Behind them, after an impressive pause, the vivats rising to a greater crescendo, came the troops under their command, the Grenadiers à pied of the Old Guard.

They marched, if it were possible, with greater precision, prouder assurance, tall men, made gigantic by the great bearskin caps, very serviceably dressed in dark blue, their only ornaments the bronze frontlets to their caps, and the Imperial Eagle and, most coveted of all regimental signs, the flaming grenade, on their satchels, all in bronze. Their faces were stern, weather-beaten, heavily moustached. They wore gold earrings and their hair in powdered pigtails. Advancing with long steady strides, they shouldered their enormous knapsacks with apparent ease, carried their muskets at the port.

Applause rose high in the air, descended on them in a cascade of frenzied sound.

'Les Grenadiers de la Garde!'

'Les Vicilles!'

'Ah-hales Grognards! Vive les Grognards!'

And again a recital of names; the battle-fields of twenty glorious years.

As the last ranks passed, Captain Coignet's stentorian voice, breaking with emotion, roared above the chorus, 'And always, Vive l'Empereur!' And, the chorus again, 'Vive la France!'

Fouler, stoical to the end, said, 'Seven battalions, nearly four thousand men,' and turned on his heel.

When the elbow of the road hid the troops, the crowd dispersed. Some looked a little sheepish, some defiant in their emotion, most were silent.

Fain said soberly, 'Men of iron,' and Bassano, 'The great, the final reserve.'

They went back to the duty room together.

Fleury said, still gripping Marie's arm, 'They give the coup de grâce.' She didn't understand. . . .

Then, incongruously, a small and shaky cart, driven by a stout, elderly woman rattled by. She wore a kind of uniform jacket and voluminous skirt of dark blue, she had shoulder straps with the flaming grenade in bronze, and a jaunty forage cap on her untidy grey hair. She waved and shouted amiably in a hoarse voice. The few watchers who remained, answered with a friendly, 'Hallo! Maria! Vive Maria!'

Marie looked questioningly at Fleury.

'Oh that's old Maria, the vivandière of the Grenadiers. She carries the brandy flasks round to the wounded, she has an old friend in the regiment; they've been together for years so it's said.'

Pierron and Archambault carried trays of lunch to the duty room. 'Chicken stew, monseigneur, I hope that will be agreeable to you—and cheese and dessert.'

Bassano thanked him politely.

'Tell M. Fleury to join us, please.' He added in a low voice to Fain, 'Fleury is too much in the kitchen with that girl. Not quite . . .'

There was chicken stew for lunch in the kitchen also. Somehow they all managed to crowd round the one table and set to with good appetites. The roar of the guns had become familiar and people only laughed when bits of ceiling fell into the food.

An orderly appeared in the yard, with the Emperor's horse, Marie, on a leading rein. They heard him asking for Desirée. In a few moments another beautiful Arab was saddled and the young man led her away.

'All's going well,' he shouted to the world in general. 'Heavy fighting at that house, Hougoumont, but we shall take it. Most of it is in ruins already.'

Marie remarked, 'That beautiful house being destroyed!'

‘Everything will be flat before the day’s out.’ Chandelier sounded pleased.

‘Including the English army,’ Pierron added.

‘Of course.’ Chandelier put a large piece of chicken into his mouth and nearly choked, exclaiming, ‘What on earth . . .’

An orderly, flushed, his shako askew, burst into the kitchen, shouting for a horse—a horse! ‘Mine’s gone lame!’ He was through into the yard. ‘General Fouler, pour l’amour de Dieu! A horse! The best you’ve got?’

Fleury ran through the kitchen in pursuit. ‘What’s the news? The news, man?’

‘News! The young man shouted, ‘Prussian officer brought in! Bülow’s corps is coming in on our right—by Chapelle Saint-Lambert. I’m going to Grouchy!’

‘*To Grouchy or for Grouchy?*’

‘Both—why don’t they hurry with that *horse*? And give me a drink—*brandy*!’

They brought him a glassful—he swallowed it at a gulp, demanded another. In a few minutes he was mounted, and Fleury and Pierron ran to watch him speeding southward.

‘Unsteady in the saddle,’ Fleury remarked.

‘What can you expect? Two glasses of brandy on an empty stomach.’ Pierron was disapproving.

A chorus in the kitchen demanded of Marie where Chapelle Saint-Lambert was and how far away. They shouted at her so, she was bewildered and stammering. Why did it matter?

Fleury repeated the question fiercely, shook her arm.

‘Over there . . .’ a vague gesture to the right, ‘past the wood.’

‘*Which* wood? Chantelet wood?’

‘No—no—the other one—farther off.’ Her mouth trembled, she was nearly in tears, her face white with alarm at his angry tone.

Seeing, realizing, his manner changed. ‘Try and think, my dear—tell us . . . if you went from here, would you go by way of Planchenoit?’

'Yes—yes.'

'And how long to walk *there*?'

'About half an hour—or a little less over the fields.'

'And then?'

The breathless silence embarrassed her. 'You go out of the village—to the left—and then right—no left, I mean, and presently you come to the wood. . . .'

Reining in his impatience, 'What is that wood called—and how far away is it?'

She paused, considering. 'The Bois de Paris—perhaps an hour—no more—I think—if you walk. . . .'

'And Chapelle Saint-Lambert? How far is it beyond the wood?'

'I've never been there. But M. Géry goes sometimes in the cart. He takes all day, but he stops in the village to talk to friends. . . .'

Useless! Fleury smiled at her woebegone face. I *do* want to help you, her expression said. . . .

After some pointless debate, Chandelier commented, 'We may have won the battle before those Prussians come up. Or Marshal Grouchy may meet and attack *them*. What numbers would you think this Bülow may have, monsieur?'

Fleury guessed, with an authoritative air, 'Perhaps twenty thousand men—perhaps more and *fresh* troops,' he added. 'They weren't in the fighting at Ligny on Friday.'

Chandelier said comfortingly, 'But we need not worry. I feel *sure* we need not worry as the Emperor knows they are approaching. He will know what to do for the best.'

Fleury, frowning in thought, was not so certain. 'But then—that orderly gone to Marshal Grouchy. He must be taking orders for Grouchy to cut in somewhere *between* the Prussians and our army. How long will *that* take Grouchy *after* the messenger catches up with him? He went off a little after two, didn't he?'

Nobody had noticed the clock strike, but it was now—a boy went to look—nearly half past two.

'But perhaps Bülow *means* to advance behind our lines, *if*

he's really at Chapelle Saint-Lambert, and cut across this turnpike road, our line of retreat to Charleroi and the French frontier. I wonder whether that Prussian prisoner is lying? And perhaps Grouchy has been ordered to cut Bülow off and *not* advance to the main battle at all—that's two quite different directions for him—which has he been ordered to follow? And *should* he catch up with the rest of the Prussian army at Wavre—how far is *that* from Mont Saint-Jean, and can he fight *all* of them and hold them off while *we* here finish off the English—or will the Prussians finish *him* off and march as it were over Grouchy's troops to join the English left? Sacred Name! This *is* complicated! I wish I knew where to find a map. I'll see if they've got one in the duty room.'

'A very intelligent young gentleman,' said Chandelier. 'But we can safely leave the *battle* to the Emperor.'

Pierron said: 'Do you realize the great battery has stopped firing—and we never noticed it?'

That set off further heated debate. Everyone had an idea on that.

Riding through a sudden shower, another orderly reined up and dismounted in leisurely fashion. Fleury pounced out upon him. 'What's happening? Pour l'amour de Dieu. . . !'

'Happening? I've come for Marshal Soult's cloak. You look pretty desperate. What's the matter?'

A page came up at a shout from Fleury and went off to find the cloak.

'This *awful* news!' Fleury said. 'The Prussians advancing from Chapelle Saint-Lambert.'

The page returned, stood goggle-eyed, listening.

'My dear chap, has *that* rumour got back to you? That's *Grouchy* arriving. I heard the Emperor say so himself. The Staff had had their glasses trained on that wood to the right—beyond Durutte's division, for quite a time. There's a sort of fog over there, you can't tell what's what. They had all been arguing about clouds and trees and troops under cover with their arms piled. The Emperor looked rather put out—

walked up and down, tapping his boot with his riding whip—the way he does, you know, when he's thinking. Then he would stop, call for Gudin and the telescope and look through it for a long time. Eventually he sent General Bernard to find out from Marbot's Hussar patrols at the stone bridge over that river, the Dyle. Nobody dared utter a word, the Emperor looked so thoughtful. Ney's aide was waiting for orders to open the attack on the English centre, that farmhouse, La Haye Sainte. When Bernard got back (he was quite a time) the Emperor took him aside to hear his report. Then the Emperor turned and said to us all, "It's all right, gentlemen, that's Grouchy arriving!"

'But—the Prussian officer, the prisoner?'

'I saw no Prussian prisoner. Somebody's nonsense, I expect.'

'But—the orderly going *to* Grouchy said there's a Prussian officer brought in. That that's Bülow's corps coming from the Chapelle Saint-Lambert direction.'

'I was sent off to Hougoumont with a message—perhaps there was a Prussian—but I shouldn't worry if I were you. The first attack is going splendidly. Ney led in the whole of the 1st corps—in column of battalions, enormously strong formation. They went right down into the hollow—arms ported—that dip is deeper than you would think—of course you haven't *seen* anything—pity that—the rye hid them almost at once and we lost them finally in the smoke as they began to climb up the other side. But we heard the English guns—and so we knew! An orderly brought word that our men had passed the English forward posts and the guns and were fighting hand-to-hand with the English first line, on the plateau behind. The English are definitely shaken. We've captured a Colour. Ney's waiting for cavalry support and then it will all be over.'

He took the cloak and rode away as leisurely as he had come.

The pages were dancing in the hall, chanting in unison. 'Villainton est rossé! Villainton est rossé! Bruxelles est à nous, à nous! Bruxelles est à nous!'

'Be quiet, you imbeciles, M. de Bassano is writing,' said Fleury. Unconvinced by the orderly, he went back to the duty room, shaking his head.

Dr. Larrey and three assistant surgeons, their saddle bags bulging with equipment and a train of empty ambulance carts trundling behind, set off down the road towards the battle-field.

In the kitchen, Chandelier was busy with the dinner preparations, but undecided about the timing of the roast. 'You never know when he'll come.'

Pierron was thinking of laying the dinner table. The boys were bringing in firewood. Marie was helping where she could. Excitement mounted in her. *He* would be back—victorious—quite soon. For some reason, General Radet had marched his military police from the yard to the turnpike road. Only those guarding the Imperial treasure remained. The Chasseurs at an order from Major Duuring, their commander, joined the police.

Pierron went to the front door. Marie and a few of the boys tiptoed after him. There were wounded men passing, some roughly bandaged, some limping, some so feeble as to need to be supported by a comrade. But there were other soldiers scuttling along without arms or knapsacks, apparently unhurt. The Chasseurs stood shoulder to shoulder, with their bayonets crossed, making a bristling hedge of steel, barring the road southward. In line with them the police, spread westwards over the fields. Major Duuring and General Radet, their swords drawn, were walking up and down.

Pierron said angrily, 'Deserters! Cowards! Look at them!'

Halted by the line of bayonets, the fit men would protest weakly, even tearfully, and receiving curt commands from the officers, reluctantly turned back towards the battle-field. It was pitiful and shaming.

PART 5

The last messenger

‘May it please you, Sirc, to send me your orders ; I can thus receive them before beginning my movement tomorrow.’

Grouchy’s dispatch from Walhain, written about eleven o’clock on the morning of the 18th, carried by the aide-de-camp, de la Fresnaye and delivered to Napoleon at La Belle Alliance at about half past three on the afternoon of that day.

RIDING slowly towards the farm, from Rossomme, came two horsemen, one in a once splendid uniform, now dirty and torn, his face blackened with smoke, his left arm hanging limp and dripping with blood. He still wore his feathered hat, cocked at a rakish angle, giving him an incongruously jaunty air. Sometimes his companion was obliged to support him as he swayed in the saddle.

Pierron positively ran to the duty room, burst in without knocking. 'Prince Jérôme wounded, monseigneur!'

Bassano, Fain and Fleury hurried anxiously to the door. The Prince was dismounting, slowly walked into the farm, smiling wanly, and dropped into a chair hastily brought. The aide-de-camp went for a surgeon, who came running.

A moment or two to rest, a good dose of brandy; then the coat sleeve was quickly cut off. The linen shirt sleeve, reduced to a bloody pulp, had served to staunch the wound. The senior surgeon, old Dr. Percy, arrived to supervise and sympathize. A nuisance, hampering of course, but not serious, he said, and inquired about the wound received on Friday.

'That?' Jérôme smiled. 'Forgotten all about it.' And to the surgeon, 'Bandage so that I can hold the rein. Mustn't be out of this, you know.' The wound dressed and bandaging begun, he said eagerly, 'Such a time as we've been having at Hougoumont! I went in early myself, with the light infantry with the bayonet. Poor Bauduin was killed beside me. There were Nassauers and Hanoverians—stubborn fellows. Had to beat them back step by step. We took a good hour getting them clear of the wood and then they got reinforcements—English Guards—the Coldstream—and some Brunswickers. Both regiments, tremendous fighters. When

we had cleared the wood—mon Dieu!—about thirty feet ahead of us was a high garden wall—six feet at least—solid brick and an oak gate! They were firing at us through loopholes. So much for Haxo saying there were *no* fortifications! That château is fortified well enough. My poor chaps were falling in heaps. I sent to Foy—his men were standing about l'arme au bras and he let me have his 1st brigade. . . . Thank you, surgeon, that's splendid. Guilleminot wanted me to call it off. Not me! Then Reille ordered me to retire the men into the wood again—after we were up to the wall! He reminded me, very civilly I admit, that my attack was only a feint to draw the English from their centre on Mont Saint-Jean and not a full-dress engagement. I replied that for *me* it *was* a full-dress engagement. That *I* was going on. So we did. Legros—a fine fellow—hacked down the gate under terrific fire and we were in! We fought them back to the threshold of the château. And they're all still hard at it. But I got this wound and somehow Napoleone—the Emperor—heard of it and ordered me away. Desperately disappointing! But—one doesn't dispute with Nap—the Emperor—in the middle of a battle. At least I—daren't.' He grinned boyishly at the anxious faces around him.

Another horseman was at the door. 'Dispatch from Marshal Grouchy. Where is the Emperor?'

Jérôme ordered the messenger to be brought to him.

'Ah! De la Fresnaye. I remember you—once one of my brother's pages. What's the news of Grouchy? We heard he is coming in on the right by way of Chapelle Saint-Lambert.'

De la Fresnaye looked bewildered. 'I left him shortly after eleven o'clock at Walhain, Your Highness. There was no talk of anything but continuing the march to Wavre in pursuit of the Prussians, according to His Majesty's orders of yesterday midday.'

'Yesterday—midday?'

'Yes, Your Highness. When Marshal Grouchy parted from His Majesty during the inspection of the battle-field of Ligny, he received His Majesty's orders to pursue the Prussians and find out their intentions.'

'Do you mean that the Marshal has had *no* orders since yesterday midday—*Saturday*?'

Bassano said, 'With all respects Your Highness, a messenger went through here at about—when was it?'

'About a quarter past two,' Fleury said eagerly. 'Riding hell-for-leather. He said he was going *to* and *for* Marshal Grouchy.'

'Quarter past two, and you, de la Fresnaye, have taken—what time. . . ?'

'Nearly four hours, Your Highness. We have to come and go by way of Gembloux and Quatre Bras, three sides of the square. The direct way across country is difficult marshland and it is thought unsafe too—because of the danger of capture.'

'So that messenger will hardly reach Marshal Grouchy before six o'clock this evening. . . ?' Jérôme frowned.

Fleury, who had been waiting impatiently for a pause, broke in: 'But Zenowicz went with a dispatch at about half past eleven and he said His Majesty had told him to catch up with Grouchy—Marshal Grouchy, I mean—and not leave him till his two corps had joined up on our right.'

'Ah . . .' Jérôme said, stretching his legs with an appearance of relief, 'that sounds much better. Zenowicz should be with Marshal Grouchy about now—or within half an hour.'

Fain commented grimly, 'Zenowicz draws the long bow, Your Highness. Marshal Soult said there were no orders to call Grouchy in.'

'What was Marshal Grouchy doing when you left him, de la Fresnaye?'

'He was breakfasting, Your Highness. In the summer-house of a M. Hollërt. There was a dish of very fine strawberries.'

'Well, there's nothing intrinsically reprehensible in breakfasting—or eating strawberries in June. I suppose *you* didn't get any?'

'No, Your Highness.'

'Had he had recent information of the movements of the Prussian army?'

‘A former non-commissioned officer of the 27th Chasseurs à cheval had ridden in from Perwez. He said that the Prussian wounded were moving away towards Liège, that the three corps which had fought on Friday at Ligny were marching on Wavre—in fact he imagined that they must almost have reached that village and that the corps—the 4th, Bülow’s I think—which had not fought at Ligny, had joined them. Prussian officers passing through Perwez were boasting that they were on their way to join the English army.’

‘Tell the Emperor all this, de la Fresnaye. It may be useful. Our guide Decoster, is an imbecile. He doesn’t know or won’t know anything he is asked and is as frightened as a rabbit.’

De la Fresnaye asked leave to go. The dispatch . . .

Jérôme signified consent with a casual wave of the hand.

‘It seems to me,’ said Fain, ‘that it all depends on that messenger who left here at a quarter past two, catching up with Grouchy and deflecting him from his march to Wavre to cross the Dyle as soon as possible and march towards us.’

Jérôme nodded, rose, straightened himself, flexed his arm cautiously.

‘There’s one thing we can count on, gentlemen. Even if no messenger arrives—which is most unlikely—this west wind will carry the sound of our gunfire to Grouchy. He will have heard it soon after de la Fresnaye left him at Walhain, eating those fine strawberries. . . .’ He grinned. ‘A nice touch that! Poor de la Fresnaye! Grouchy is an officer of long experience—he will certainly march towards the sound of the guns with all the troops he has in hand. He will be here sooner than we think. His corps commanders—Gérard in particular—a brilliant officer—will strengthen what surely *must* be Grouchy’s own inclination. Don’t despond, gentlemen. We shall see Grouchy arriving at any moment now. Why my brother chose to announce positively and let the rumour spread that Grouchy was already in sight, is his own business. Nobody ever understands the whole of his mind in battle. . . . Let me have my horse. I must get back. I’m ordered to stay

near Nap—the Emperor. Fairly hot *there* too.' He shrugged, winced slightly and went out with his aide-de-camp: the civilians followed him into the road. Major Duuring saluted.

'Fugitives, Duuring? Where from?'

'General Durutte's division, Your Highness. On the extreme right.'

'Hum—what's upsetting them?'

'Rumours of the Prussians coming up and some English or Belgian cavalry cutting into them.'

'But everything goes marvellously. D'Erlon's corps is on the plateau of Mont Saint-Jean, the centre of the English position. It only needs the infantry to hold till the cavalry come up. Deny the rumour of the Prussians. Grouchy will be here on the right wing at any moment now. Get these men back into the line in time for the final rallying call.'

'How confident he sounds,' muttered Fleury.

'A typical Bonaparte,' Fain said smiling, as they returned to the duty room.

'Some of them—are much *too* confident,' Bassano remarked. 'Prince Joseph. . . .'

'Prince *Joseph* is not a subject for polite conversation,' Fain said tartly. 'A vain and lazy nincompoop! Fleury, you aren't meant to hear that. But I could tell you. . . .'

Fleury smiled. 'I've heard enough about Prince Joseph and Prince Lucien and Prince Louis—and the girls.' He began a spirited and lurid exposition of the characters and habits of the Emperor's sisters.

Bassano, mock-serious, checked him. 'These injudicious and ill-founded criticisms must cease. I am surprised at you—here—in the Palace.'

'I never knew you had a sense of humour, monseigneur.'

'In the circumstances in which I am placed, I have to conceal it. The Emperor, unfortunately, has none himself and does not relish it in his servants.' His mouth curved in the prim little smile. 'But the Emperor's generosity to his greedy and conceited family is one of his amiable and dangerous weaknesses. And no spreading abroad of *that* remark either, if you please.'

Jérôme had ridden off amidst a ragged, feeble cheer or two. He waved his uninjured hand gaily, said something which made the fugitives cheer more lustily, and hastened some on their return towards the battle-field.

'He's a brave fellow, a heartening fellow, in contrast with the others,' said Bassano. 'I don't wonder the Emperor wanted him out of that affair at Hougoumont, the best loved, *little* brother.'

'He's no *general*,' Fain was scornful. 'Only the Emperor's affection got him that divisional command. His second, Guilleminot, has the *head*. Fancy disregarding his corps commander—perhaps throwing away hundreds of men needlessly! I should imagine the Emperor was merely relieving him of his command in a tactful manner.'

'The Emperor is not given to *tact* where war is concerned—or in any other matter,' said Bassano. 'But he has always been lenient with Prince Jérôme. It seems to me—as a layman—that the Prince is—er—completely misinformed about the whole situation. Natural enough, of course, when he has been fighting in what is a comparatively small corner. Soult told me definitely last night that Grouchy has *no* experience as an independent commander.'

Fain said, 'Do you believe that Grouchy will disobey the Emperor's explicit orders and, on his own initiative, march towards the sound of our guns?'

'No, I do not.'

'But Desaix did at Marengo—and saved the day,' Fleury said impetuously.

'My dear young friend.' Bassano was his calm, sententious self again. 'You know nothing of the year 1800. You weren't out of school. . . .'

'Pardon me, monseigneur, I was nearly *twenty*. I am only about a year younger than my superior, M. le Baron Fain.' He bowed, grinning at Fain.

'At all events you *act* like a very young man—certainly not like thirty-five. Now, M. Fain . . .'

'Has had the advantage of years of campaigning. It soberes a man very quickly, I see. I,' said Fleury, flushing

angrily, a sarcastic note in his voice, 'I have *only* been a Prefect, certainly during a period of some stress, but *only* a Prefect. Head of the administration of an important Department—responsible only to the Minister of the Interior—who is himself responsible to the Emperor. . . .'

'My dear *young* friend—I must still call you so—from my advanced age of fifty-two years—you need not launch into a long exposition of a subject with which I am well acquainted. But don't be afraid that I belittle you. You gained the epithet "intrepid" by your conduct at Rheims during the fighting last year.'

'And,' Fleury was still unappeased, 'I was in close personal touch with the Emperor in Elba—sent by yourself, M. de Bassano—entrusted with a special mission—to urge the Emperor to return to France at once—which he did.' His foot tapped impatiently as he talked and he glanced angrily from Bassano to Fain.

'We were speaking of the year 1800,' Fain said, 'when you interrupted M. de Bassano.'

'I was simply going to say that young General Bonaparte in the year 1800, become only a few months before First Consul of the Republic—not yet firmly in the saddle in France, was a very different person from our autocrat Emperor, beloved, assured, highly experienced—fighting—I believe—his sixtieth pitched battle today. *Then*—in 1800—he would admit mistakes, he would *consult* his brother generals—he accepted the position of *primus inter pares*—moreover—he realized he had rivals in the public's affection. Moreau, the victor of Hohenlinden, for instance . . .'

'Ah, Hohenlinden—that *was* a thrill . . .'

'Don't *interrupt* if you please, Fleury, I lose the thread of my argument. At Marengo, a victory much less complete than Hohenlinden, he sent a message to Desaix "Pour l'amour de Dieu, come back".'

'Did he? I never heard that,' said Fleury, excited.

'He loved and trusted Desaix—and the trust was not misplaced. Our Emperor of today—with all his supreme qualities of mind, his power of quick decision—his eye for

the ground, for the disposal of his troops, is a much more difficult master to serve. He loves none, he trusts none with the secrets of his strategic plan. He could never send such a message nowadays to anyone—even in the direst straits. It would be out of character—now.'

'He trusts Davout,' Fain put in. 'He talks strategy with him. I wonder that he was left behind in Paris.'

'Davout, rough and rude as he is, is one of the few absolutely loyal servants of His Majesty. Who else could he leave as Minister of War? Who else could he trust with the complicated machinery of reinforcements, supplies and the thousand details of war *and* trust to control the disaffected? He trusts Carnot—he trusts Caulaincourt—and is perfectly justified in so doing. But only those three stand by him, are ready to ward off the political stab in the back which awaits him at the first sign of—misfortune—here. Look at those ready to betray—Fouché. . . .'

'Don't talk of that rat—he ought to have been hanged long ago. Sold to King Louis at Ghent,' Fain said.

'Fouché plays a double—almost a treble game. Neither you nor I, Fain, can unravel the complicated schemings of Fouché's mind. Minister of Police again—less dangerous, perhaps—than left at large and out of reach of the surveillance of the loyal ministers.'

Fleury exclaimed impatiently, 'So you *don't* think Grouchy will march to the sound of the guns?'

'I fear not.'

Fain, nodding agreement, added: 'He knew the Emperor intended to attack the English today. Gunfire will not surprise him.'

'So Prince Jérôme is wrong in all his assumptions?' Fleury asked.

'I fear so,' Bassano sighed. 'But I can't help liking him. He has courage.'

'Like his brother,' said Fain. 'Everyone declares that the Emperor in battle is at his most calm and serene.'

'Only,' said Bassano, smiling, 'Jérôme is neither calm nor serene—but impetuous and wilful. Look at him—wounded

on Friday—danced all last night at Genappe—fights again today—another wound—and as cheerful as you please.'

Fleury, who had been searching through Bassano's papers, muttered something about 'a map'.

'You won't find a map there,' said Bassano. 'You are muddling up my papers *most* inconsiderately. My instructions to Carnot, my report to Caulaincourt—and a letter to my wife.'

Fleury turned from the table, saw Marshal Soult's portfolio on a chair, unconcernedly tipped the contents on to the floor.

'And I forbid you to meddle with Marshal Soult's papers,' Bassano exclaimed.

Fleury hesitated, smiling.

Fain added severely, 'That is a command! Put back those papers at once! As your immediate superior—'

Fleury, unwillingly complied. 'I do *hate* not knowing,' he said disconsolately.

The Portfolio, after knocking at the half-open door, walked in, laid Jérôme's feathered hat on the table and vanished again without speaking. They decided that an orderly would certainly come for it, placed it carefully on a shelf and forgot about it.

The kitchen was buzzing with talk. Some of the boys had overheard—and misheard—the discussion with Jérôme. Everyone had his own suggestion about the whereabouts and the character of Grouchy, the probability of his arriving or not. Tempers were ruffled by anxiety, doubt, weariness. Only Chandelier, who was thinking more of his dinner preparations than of the tactics of battle, contributed the soothing comment of the Emperor knowing best—always. 'Half past three—six o'clock—perhaps a little later. I shall soon have to put the mutton in. The Emperor likes his mutton well done—*very* well done, in fact.'

He set the boys to a variety of tasks.

In the duty room, Bassano had called in Authéry to take

down a memorandum. Fain was writing on his own. Fleury, hands in pockets, watched them, exasperated, bored, contemptuous at so much apparently useless effort. What *did* the civilian jobs matter at this moment? He suggested tentatively that he might go down the road—just to the turning. . . .

Fain answered with a curt No. Civilians must keep out of the way.

‘Well, I’m no use here.’

‘Can’t you sit down? Keep still, read a book?’

‘*Read a book*—with all this going on? M. le Baron, have a heart! *You’ve* the luck to be busy. I can’t think what *at*,’ he added under his breath. ‘All this endless writing . . . writing . . .’

Fain retorted, ‘I heard you, Fleury. You have never troubled to learn your job as second secretary properly. You could be useful even now—if you cared to be. But you’ll only make mistakes if I give you anything to do. But when the Bulletin comes in, you shall copy it.’

‘The fairy tale for Paris? That will be amusing.’

Bassano glanced up at him, frowning.

‘I’m sorry, monseigneur, but you know . . .’

‘That such things are not *said* in the Palace.’

Fleury drifted off to the kitchen. ‘I think they must be compiling the washing list for the whole army in there.’

Picron looked shocked. Marie giggled. Chandelier took no notice.

‘If *only* I could sneak a horse . . .’ Fleury began and stopped as Noverraz, the Emperor’s private messenger, burst in, waving his arms and shouting incoherently, ‘Hopeless—lost—all lost—the English cavalry among the great battery—Marchand, where is he?—handkerchiefs for the Emperor—hopeless!’

They sat him in a chair, tried to soothe him into some sort of sense.

‘Here’s a little brandy for you,’ said Picron. ‘Drink it slowly and tell us what’s happening.’

‘I’ll fetch Marchand,’ said Fleury, ‘he knows this fellow’s

funny little ways. Handkerchiefs for the Emperor, did you say?’

‘Yes, yes, handkerchiefs. The English cavalry—right up to the great battery—all over the place—almost to La Belle Alliance—the Emperor—killing everyone—long sabres—those beautiful grey horses—everywhere! Those pipes they blow for victory—hopeless—all over!’

‘Nonsense. It can’t be all over,’ said Pierron. ‘Just a cavalry charge, I suppose. We have to expect *some* resistance.’

Marchand appeared with handkerchiefs. Noverraz continued to wail.

Fleury, returned, said, ‘There are crowds of walking wounded coming along and Dr. Larrey with some of the ambulance carts. I shall go to meet him. He’s sure to have some news.’

Pierron agreed. Dr. Larrey always went right forward on a battle-field. To Noverraz he said severely, ‘Don’t let the wounded hear this nonsense. It will be bad for their morale.’

Marchand had secured a horse, announced that he was going with Noverraz. The Emperor might be needing something else. Fleury glowered at Marchand for finding so good an excuse.

Marie had crept to the front door. Fascinated and horrified, she watched the wounded arriving. They stumbled and jostled and fell and struggled to their feet again; they were often barefoot, with clothes torn, faces blackened by powder or smeared with blood and dirt. Some fell and lay unheeded, moaning in agony, sometimes dying, unattended.

Marie, frightened but wishing to help, moved into the road, but a surgeon shepherding a group into the barn called to her roughly but kindly, ‘Don’t you interfere, missy, this job’s not for you. Go indoors, my dear, and stay there.’

Ashamed, but thankful, she fled into the shelter of the house, went sobbing to the kitchen. The men comforted her, themselves quite philosophical. This was war. Nothing

could make it pleasant, but it had to be gone through with when it started. Pierron treated her to a small glass of brandy.

Dr. Larrey's account was reassuring. He had seen a fierce charge by English heavy cavalry, that regiment with the famous dapple-grey horses amongst them. They had reached the great battery, killed some of the gunners, even spiked some of the guns; one had to admire their courage. But they had had to retire in disorder, leaving many men and horses dead. It was said that d'Erlon's men *had* reached the plateau behind the English batteries, but they had been obliged to retreat because of the tough resistance of the English squares. While he had been collecting wounded an aristocratic voice had called in English to a battery, to hold its fire. A very gentlemanly act. Marshal Soult had said it might well have been Wellington himself. It would be typical of him.

'As for the battle,' Dr. Larrey had ended, 'this is only a temporary check. And the English losses must be very heavy.'

Fleury brought all this news to the kitchen. Pierron and Chandelier capped each other, listing Dr. Larrey's campaigns.

Once again the house was shaking with the thunder of the great battery, and the rattle of English gunfire replying. Everyone was quite used to it now. The bits of ceiling falling, merely made the boys laugh, particularly when Chandelier got hit on the head. The pages were playing draughts or 'Goose' on the stairs under inconvenient conditions. Occasionally one or two would go to look out at the front door, comment on the endless streams of wounded and the stern way in which Major Duuring was handling the fugitives. Marie remained in the kitchen. She couldn't bear the sights and sounds of the road.

Marchand returned, calm and reassuring also. The smoke was so thick you couldn't *see* anything, but a charge of massed squadrons of cavalry was going in soon. He had soothed

Noverraz on the way forward. He must have been near the Emperor when the English cavalry charged up the slope towards the road and La Belle Alliance and that had put him in a panic. A pity! *Not* a good person to have in the front line. He might lose his head and be unfit to do the simple tasks allotted to him. After all . . . Ney was in command under the Emperor and no one could doubt his energy or courage in a battle. 'I feel sure that we shall win.'

He was still talking in his quiet, impersonal voice when Ali burst in. Everyone forsook the calm Marchand to cluster round this newcomer, raining questions on him.

'What's happening, *really*?'

'Where's the Emperor?'

'Have we really been beaten so far?'

'Has the cavalry gone in yet?'

'Are the Prussians there yet?'

'Any news of Grouchy?'

'How can you expect me to know everything? I've come for a cold meal for the Emperor, M. Chandelier, if you please.'

'But you're up with the Emperor at La Belle—whatever it is. You *must* know. . . .'

'I know *nothing*. I have to stay at La Belle Alliance. The Emperor is often on the move. At La Belle Alliance we are all in the fog.'

'Fog, fog!' said a page. 'Damn the fog! *Everyone* makes the fog an excuse.'

Others were demanding, 'But Grouchy? Where's Grouchy?'

'No one knows. M. de la Fresnaye came in with a dispatch half an hour ago. The Emperor looked very stern while he read it. They said he said to Marshal Soult, "We still have sixty chances to forty if . . ." Everyone had their own idea of "if". . . . I don't know. Mostly they seemed to think it meant taking that farmhouse, La Haye Sainte.'

'Is that *all*?' The boys were disappointed.

'I *did* hear General Flahaut say that perhaps the Emperor might decide to break off the battle until tomorrow. . . .'

'Oh!' A general exclamation of mingled astonishment, dismay and, perhaps, relief.

'I don't really *know*. Perhaps it was General Flahaut's own idea. They're full of ideas up there.'

But Flahaut's idea took hold.

Fleury went to tell Bassano and Fain, the boys became again amateur strategists, shouting emphatic opinions at one another and to the coachmen and grooms in the yard.

Chandelier, packing half a cold chicken, bread and a bottle of Chambertin into a silver canteen case for the Emperor, merely reiterated that the Emperor always knew what to do.

Pierron, practical, said, 'That'll mean another night here. Missy, you really must go and make the beds.'

Drained of energy by emotion and physical weariness, Marie went slowly upstairs. Fleury, from the duty room door, saw her go.

She was sitting, listless and woebegone, on a bed, half-made, when Fleury found her later. He sat beside her, held her hand, made soothing noises.

'All this is too much for you, poor girl.'

She admitted it was—and yet?

He put an arm about her—brotherly fashion—and her head rested on his shoulder. 'Too much for you,' he repeated. 'Is he so seductive?'

She trembled violently, said nothing.

'I know—too well—I oughtn't to have asked you that,' he whispered, 'but I hate to see a little bird caught in a snare.'

That roused her, 'It's not a snare. It's—it's *real*.'

He sighed, kissed her gently. 'He—muddles one's thinking all the time—what to believe—whether to give—whether to fend him off—how to endure—how *not* to love him *that* is the problem. How *not* to be filled with—adoration.'

She pulled away, attempted to glower at him, repeated, 'It is *not* a snare,' and burst into heartbroken sobs. From incoherencies he made out the words 'Tonight—Brussels.'

Presently, calmed by his kindness, she said, 'I must finish these beds,' and then, reluctant to move, 'You said you would tell me about the iron cage.'

'You won't like the story.'

'But I want to know.'

'It's just this. Marshal Ney—that redhead—was in the service of King Louis of France last year. When the Emperor came back from Elba, Ney promised the King that he would capture the Emperor and bring him to Paris in an iron cage.'

'Oh, how could he say that?'

'Difficult to explain. But Ney is a—nervy—man. He *too* has muddled emotions—about the Emperor.'

'Nervy' meant nothing to her. Indignation filled her.

'But he didn't, did he?'

'Sacred Name! No. He marched at the head of his troops to meet the Emperor. He got as far as Lons-le-Saulnier and then—he knew he couldn't do it. He sent his humble allegiance to the Emperor.'

'What does that mean?'

'That he was ready to be his loyal servant again.'

'I should have thought the—the Emperor wouldn't have had him—after all that.'

'Oh, but he did. That's his magnanimity.'

'His—what?'

'His readiness to forgive offences. He sent him a message that he was ready to welcome him as on the morning after the *Moskowa*.' Then, of course, he had to explain the splendid meaning and honour of that message.

She sighed happily. 'I'm sure that is just like the Emperor. But he ought to have punished that Ney, really.'

'I think,' Fleury said soberly, 'that Ney is punished already and for as long as he lives. His conscience will never let him forget or forgive himself.'

'D'you think *that* is enough?'

'More than enough for a man essentially honourable.'

'But he can't be.'

'But he is, my dear—but he's just a bundle of emotions—

and a great red face. Tremendously brave, utterly fearless, once he is in battle. But beforehand and in between whilsts he is all nervous fears and quirks and furious tempers and sulks—and stupidities.'

'I don't like the sound of him at all. And yet he *looks* rather nice.'

'I only hope he'll think straight today.'

'But you said in battle, tremendously brave.'

'That doesn't mean doing the right thing instinctively and coolly when you've got to make a quick decision. And the Emperor is relying on Ney to carry out his tactical commands today.'

'What a lot you do know, M. Fleury.'

He offered to help her with the double beds. Relieved for the moment, she laughed gaily at the way he pulled the sheets askew, positively panting with anxiety to get them right. 'No—no—so—get it right in the centre, and then, carry your hand along, against the pillows to get it tight and straight.'

He couldn't do it, vowed it was the most difficult thing he had ever attempted, that she was a marvel of cleverness, added, 'We're quits now. I can talk about war and you can make beds. Which, when all's said and done, is the most useful accomplishment?'

'Accomplishment' had to be explained.

'Your French is so nice to listen to, monsieur, but you do use long words.'

'I keep on forgetting that you're not French. You speak it so nicely yourself.'

PART 6

Befogged

‘Comrades, you would not have me break my word to Wellington.’

Blücher to Bülow’s artillerymen, manhandling the guns through the Bois de Paris and the marshlands towards Planchenoit. About half past four on the afternoon of 18th June.

THEY remembered to drop hands, smiling a little guiltily at each other, at the kitchen door. But the kitchen was in mourning and nobody noticed them. A Grenadier of the Old Guard, in tears, was the centre of the sympathetic group.

Old Maria was dead! A stray bullet had killed her as she drew up behind the last battalion of the Guard, taking up its position at Rossomme.

The Grenadier had come for a spade. They were going to bury her where she had fallen, like the old soldier she was.

'Her old comrade is crying like a child—small wonder. Together since Italy in '96. *I've* known her—long—can't say how long. Part of the regiment. A good sort, always cheerful—helped everybody. Sacred Name! What brutes to kill a *woman*!' He picked up the spade, drew his sleeve across his eyes. 'I must go—they're waiting.' Then, shouldering the spade like a musket, he stumped off through the yard and away over the fields.

They were still exclaiming when Marchand came in, worried.

'They won't let me through.'

'Through? Where?' Fleury queried.

'The duty room. There's a great discussion going on. M. de Bassano sent me away and forbade me the bedroom—for fear I should overhear. I suppose. General Bailly de Mont-hion is there.'

'Ho, ho! Soult's chief of staff! What can *he* want?' Fleury commented.

Everyone had a suggestion to make.

'I'll see if they'll let *me* in,' said Fleury, but he too was sent away.

'They all look very serious,' he said.

Chandelier hustled the boys into greater activity. The saddle of mutton couldn't wait upon M. de Bassano's con-claves. It must go into the oven soon, if it was to be ready on time.

'What do you call—*on time*, M. Chandelier?' a boy asked.

'Six—seven o'clock perhaps—who knows? But we must be ready for His Majesty quite by seven.'

Presently Fain put his head out of the duty room door and called for Fleury, who went off, looking important.

Amidst the dinner preparations someone remarked that only the English guns were firing. More argument, wild speculation, bright ideas.

Marie had a pile of washing-up to do, Chandelier was much too lavish in his use of pots and pans.

Fleury was a long time gone. They heard General Bailly leaving. A boy leapt to the half-open kitchen door, listened intently, whispered excitedly over his shoulder. 'He said, "If Ney captures La Haye Sainte—we shall have time." . . .'

Time for what? Everyone stopped what they were doing to argue afresh. Coachmen and grooms, come for a bite and a sup, joined in. Pages also demanding food, added their ideas, wished they had something exciting to do. They were sick of waiting about, just playing silly games. Chandelier was closing the discussion with his usual comment and 'It's the Emperor's sixtieth pitched battle, he won't make a mistake *now*,' when Fleury reappeared, looking happily mysterious.

There was clamour around him. He *must* tell them, he simply must. . . . He kept them on tenterhooks, finally acquiesced, enjoying himself. 'It's all this business of getting hold of Grouchy. The Emperor fears he has misunderstood the implications of his instructions—even the quite definite ones of yesterday . . .' (The boys were explaining 'implications' to one another), 'which were to keep in touch with the right of our army here and manoeuvre towards us. He hasn't. He seems to have marched straight on towards Wavre, on the *other* side of the Dyle.'

He had to explain, with apparently authoritative knowledge, the importance of the Dyle, that effective water barrier, and its marshland surroundings, and describe (from imagination) the only available bridges. He thought to himself: I'm doing this rather well.

'Marbot's Hussar patrols, who were on guard at one of the bridges'—he waved a hand towards the yard door, 'waited as long as they dared—but they saw no sign of Grouchy. Now the Prussians are advancing. . . .'

A great deal of chatter about Prussians and their general beastliness, interrupted him.

'Be quiet, you boys,' Pierron said severely. 'Let M. Fleury finish.'

'The worst thing is, de la Fresnaye's dispatch says Grouchy is marching farther *away* from us all the time, to attack the Prussians whom he thinks are gathered in the plain of La Chyse' (he hadn't the least idea where that was but General Bailly had known and it sounded well to bring out that detail) 'and that they will swing in a wide arc' (a good word) 'north-west' (another good touch) 'to attack Brussels itself.'

Everyone said 'Oh!' with varying degrees of understanding. 'And—and'—Fleury was working towards his climax—'we know that Bülow's corps has avoided contact with Grouchy and is already this side of the Dyle, over there,' again a right-hand gesture, 'gathered in the Bois de Paris, prepared to attack—we don't know when. And—and—in the final sentence of his dispatch, Grouchy is asking for orders for *tomorrow*!'

He had achieved the maximum effect and enjoyed his success, though it was only with the kitchen staff and the grooms and pages.

The astonished chorus of 'Tomorrow!' satisfied his relish for the dramatic on all occasions.

The youthful speculations amused him. The pages plied him with questions.

'Why didn't our patrols go faster to look for Grouchy?'

'Won't Zenowicz have caught up with him?'

'Or that messenger at half past one?'

'Grouchy *must* have had the sense to march towards us when he heard the guns—hours ago.'

'Grouchy *knew* the Emperor would fight a battle today—the guns wouldn't surprise him a bit.'

'Grouchy's a *fool* anyway—my father said so when he heard he was made a Marshal.'

'Why doesn't that Bülow attack if his corps is in that wood?'

'Expect he's afraid.'

That satisfied all the young people. Bülow's afraid—nothing to worry about.

Marchand, through all the talk and argument had stood silent and a little apart. His pale face was drawn with anxiety. Fleury turned, spoke to him in a low tone.

'You take things to heart terribly, Marchand.'

Marchand continued silent.

Fleury, a hand on his arm, urged him out of the kitchen. Passing the clock, Marchand glanced at it. 'Just four o'clock. Will this day *ever* end? I was so *sure* of victory—*quick* victory when I went forward earlier.'

Fleury said, seriously, 'No use telling them in there, but Ney's two infantry attacks on La Haye Sainte have failed. Although the English have had a terrific battering from our artillery, they're standing as firm as ever. But Milhaud's heavy cavalry and Lefebvre-Desnouëttes' light cavalry of the Guard were just going in when General Bailly left the forward position. Five thousand troopers—a tremendous sight and weight, he said. That *should be* decisive.'

Marchand said, 'It should—of course. But,' he sighed, 'I can't forget my heavy personal responsibilities, monsieur. So many valuable possessions in my care—I have three hundred thousand francs in bills of exchange here,' he laid his hand upon his breast pocket, 'besides all the diamonds in the baggage.' He paused and sighed again. 'I can bear all *that* but—when the Emperor is in mortal danger . . .'

Fleury nodded in silent sympathy.

'At heart your feelings, though so well hidden, are the same as my own, monsieur.'

'Yes.'

'For me, monsieur, the Emperor is as my own father.'

Fleury smiled wryly. 'For me—but we spoke of this earlier—mon Dieu—if...?' Then, with an effort at lightness, 'I'm talking nonsense, of course.'

'Of course, monsieur.'

They stood there, in the passage, looking at each other and, by a simultaneous impulse, embraced with brotherly affection. Parting, they both tried to smile and failed, but remained standing together, in silence, each sustained by mutual sympathy and hope. The now hot afternoon sunshine blazed down upon them at the front door.

Three orderlies were dismounting. They had with them six led horses, all of them lamed.

'General Drouot needs more horses,' said one.

'What's happening?' Fleury and Marchand demanded simultaneously.

'I must find General Fouler,' said one, but a companion replied eagerly, 'Wonderful! Ney's leading in Milhaud's Cuirassiers and the light cavalry of the Guard. I was forward with Drouot, and I heard Ney tell him that the English were retreating into the forest—Soignes—and that with the cavalry he expected to capture that damned La Haye Sainte and break the English line. Sacred Name! It *was* a marvellous sight! Just for a few minutes we saw it—all that colour and glitter—five thousand trotting in perfect formation—then the fog—blotted it all out. We've just got to wait—for a *very* little time now.'

'They won't fail,' the third orderly said.

'Of course not. But the waiting is frightful. Only the Emperor looks calm. I passed him at La Belle Alliance. The staff were jumpy—but he was standing quite still—his eye to his longue vue. That page is a good little chap—stands like a rock, in all this brouhaha.'

General Fouler appeared, complaining of Drouot's misuse

of his horses. 'He had eight sent up this morning---and you bring me back *six*—broken and useless—poor beasts.'

'But he's everywhere at once. The Emperor is always shouting, "Where's Drouot?" and he appears from anywhere and nowhere. He's simply marvellous.'

The fresh horses were assembled, the orderlies mounted, Fouler rode off with them. He wished to see the true state of affairs. If the whole staff were using up horses so fast, he would have to commandeer troop horses to supply them.

They progressed very slowly, threading their way through the crowds of walking wounded, round the bodies of those who had died within sight of help. The procession, in infantry blue, in artillery black, grew thicker all the time. The overloaded ambulance carts came up in a slow, jolting line. Medical orderlies ran back and forth, carrying in the wounded, leaving the dead to the police burial parties.

Dr. Larrey sent to requisition all linen from the farm. His orderlies raided closets for the Boucquéaus' clothes, cupboards and drawers for table linen, tore the used sheets off the beds, bore away the pillows and feather bedding. Nothing serviceable remained.

Fleury, impelled by anxiety and restlessness, had wandered into the barn, came back, shuddering, into the kitchen through the yard door. 'Don't anyone go in there. It's dreadful, they're cutting off arms and legs, slapping on bandages, as fast as they can. Ghastly sight!'

Chandelier, very severe, eyed him, said, 'Who would *presume* to?' and basted the mutton ferociously to show his contempt for idle people. This symbolic act was reassuring. If the Emperor was coming to dinner . . . why worry? And if Ney, the great Ney, the greatest, the bravest leader in the army—well, was he? Yes, he *was*—was leading a massive charge of five thousand troopers . . . why worry? Yes, *why worry?*

A great silence now—a blessed relief. Not even the crackle of the distant English batteries. . . .

The pages were watching the clock, counting the moments

of silence—five, ten—fifteen, eighteen—twenty—the English guns roared afresh. . . . Twenty minutes to five . . . rattle and crash from the English . . . a fresh roll . . . and a different note . . . from the right. . . .

There was a rush into the yard and everybody scrambling on to the orchard wall. The Chasseurs were already up there, exclaiming, gesticulating, growling with impatience. The Prussians? Perhaps. But nobody had a glass and though you could see the tip of Planchenoit church and the open road beyond, the Bois de Paris was nothing but a blur to the north-east.

Major Duuring climbed up, levelled his glass for a long, careful look.

‘There are troops moving out of the shade of the trees . . . but . . . impossible to distinguish uniforms yet.’

‘Grouchy?’ said someone eagerly.

‘It *must* be Grouchy!’ The usual hubbub of argument, ideas and determined hopes.

‘Grouchy! Grouchy!’ The pages were dancing on the top of the wall.

‘It *cannot* be Grouchy,’ said Major Duuring stolidly. ‘We know that Bülow has his corps in that wood.’

‘But Grouchy’s people have killed them *all*, M. le Commandant, and are coming on over their dead bodies.’

Major Duuring, level-headed Dutchman that he was, quelled this nonsense with a scornful glance.

Chandelier sent a boy in to baste the mutton again.

Bassano and Fain came to look too, for a few minutes, then returned to their waiting.

‘We can only wait,’ said the former calmly. ‘Fouler will bring us definite news.’

The boys, crestfallen, drifted back to the kitchen. The great battery opened up again, and again the ground heaved, tiles slid off the roof and people, laughing uneasily, dodged them in the yard.

Bassano, in the duty room, was methodically sorting his papers, locked some away in a portfolio, gave others to

Authéry for sealing and dispatch, 'When the messenger goes.'

Fleury, following them in, said suddenly, infuriated past endurance, 'What messenger, monseigneur—and *when*?'

Bassano, eyebrows raised, replied quietly, 'When the Bulletin goes to Paris. Let me see—it will be Noverraz—Bécotte went with the news of Ligny—yesterday morning. The Emperor will certainly send a Bulletin tonight.'

Wounded streamed past the window. Odd how soon one gets callous, Fleury thought. Half an hour ago it was terrible—but now—one shrugged and ignored them. There seemed to be more fugitives too, for General Radet's police were cursing, even striking some of the crowd. Shameful that there should be cowards, one felt bad about it. But still . . . human nature could only stand a certain amount of horror and fear. . . .

General Fouler, returning, brought soldierly calm which was reassuring. 'Two all-out cavalry charges—right on to the plateau—*behind* the English batteries. The odd thing is, the Emperor did not recognize them at first. He saw them cantering amongst the English squares and wondered for a moment who they were. The smoke had hidden their start from the hollow. . . .'

'That orderly saw them,' Fleury put in. 'But, of course, he said he was down *in* the hollow.'

'Yes, *he* was down in the hollow. There's a very different view from La Belle Alliance which dominates it. The slope up is steep, though not long and the whole of the bottom is in that accursed fog. The Emperor was put out when he saw the cavalry. "Too soon by an hour," he said. Of course, Soult, who always likes to get a dig at Ney, answered, "He'll compromise us as he did at Jena."'

'That means nothing to *me*,' Bassano said gently.

'No, monseigneur—nor was it apt. . . . The Emperor ignored Soult and said, "Since he has started, he must be supported." That charge silenced and captured many of the English batteries. . . .'

'We noticed that pause in the firing,' said Fain.

'But for some reason our men had no spiking irons and the English cavalry countercharged and recaptured the guns intact.'

'And then our cavalry charged again?' Fleury asked.
'You said twice.'

'Yes. The younger men on the staff were shouting, "Victory!" The Emperor was giving orders to Flahaut to carry to Kellermann and Guyot—all the heavies—to go in, in support, and didn't notice the shouts. Soult shut them up quickly, and now they're all arguing—a collection of amateur tacticians with nothing to do—whether the Emperor should finish off Wellington first—or go after Bülow. . . .'

'Dear me! This is all very complicated,' Bassano sighed.

'An awkward concatenation of circumstances, monseigneur,' said Fleury with a bland stare.

'Hein? Oh, yes. Thank you for your reassuring news, General. I feel all will end well before nightfall.'

'Wellington has *his* troubles too,' Fouler said cheerfully. 'Colonel Heymès came from Ney to say that thousands of Allied troops are streaming away into the forest towards Brussels. And Lobau's corps is astride the road beyond Planchenoit, ready for the Prussians debouching from the Bois de Paris.'

All this news was much appreciated in the kitchen. Spirits rose. The pages started singing again.

'The cavalry will smash the English, the Guard will go in—with the Emperor leading them, and then he'll turn round and finish off the Prussians,' said one of them.

'If only that little beast Gudin were not seeing all this. It's unfair . . . the *whole* day,' said another.

Fleury sobered him. 'Gudin's life isn't all fun. Standing stock still, with the telescope on his shoulder, while the Emperor takes a long look and the cannon balls are hurtling about.'

'I should *love* it,' said a page. His companions fell on

him and knocked him about till he squealed for mercy.

‘Enfin . . . ce brave jeune homme,’ said one of the attackers with satisfaction. ‘Pah! Your nose has bled all over me.’

‘Serve you right,’ said the injured one, and asked for a towel to mop his streaming nose. Someone pushed his head into a bucket of water in the kitchen. He didn’t like that either, and the mocking shouts redoubled.

Fain came out to request quiet on M. de Bassano’s orders. ‘You will be reported to M. de Turenne,’ he said, and went away again.

‘Ah—our *superior* officer. I wonder where he is, by the way? I haven’t seen him for ages.’

Nobody had. Suggestions came in flood.

‘Run away home perhaps.’

‘He wouldn’t *dare*.’

‘. . . Upstairs curling his hair.’

‘. . . Putting on a clean shirt. . . .’

‘. . . With goffered ruffles. . . .’

‘. . . And lace edgings. . . .’

‘. . . Admiring himself in the glass. . . .’

‘. . . Getting the clocks of his stockings straight. . . .’

‘. . . Writing to his belle amie. . . .’

‘Shut *up*, you little wretches. It’s nothing to do with *you* where he is,’ said Fleury trying to look severe.

‘He ought to be looking after *us*.’ One folded his hands in a mock-pious attitude. ‘So that *we* shouldn’t be bothering *you*, M. Fleury.’

‘Perhaps Gudin will get frightened and be sent back and then one of us will be ordered forward.’

‘Perhaps Gudin will get *killed*,’ another added with relish.

‘*I’m* next,’ said a fair-haired youth.

‘Damn you, Cambacérès! Are you indeed?’ Rioting broke out afresh among the pages. Fleury, collaring a couple, flung them from the kitchen into the passage, then followed, holding the arms of two more. ‘Now—shut up!’

They all retired to the stairs, muttering, grumbling, aiming furtive blows at Cambacérès. . . .

Fouler and Marchand had been talking in low tones in the hall.

'If it will ease your mind—do so.' Fouler ended. He passed through the kitchen, and, in the yard, called to him several coachmen and grooms and gave a brief order. They began, with careful casualness, to look over the carriages, then examined the fastenings of the cover over the Imperial treasure waggon, finally put the horses in.

Now what? The kitchen staff, watching, of course had ideas. Chandelier wished they would stop fussing about things which didn't concern them and help *him*. There were a lot of things to prepare for the dinner. Jellies, creams, fruit trifles. The Emperor enjoyed sweet things. A pity he couldn't have ices tonight, but there were no means for preparing *them*. But the specially decorated creams took time—and he, Chandelier, had been left to do so much himself. . . . Some of the boys came languidly to help. They weren't interested in the Emperor's food . . . Why couldn't he do with bread and cheese, like everyone else? . . .

Chandelier expressed his anger, disgust, dismay, and patriotic feelings in a great number of ways. The boys giggled, grimaced and pretended contrition, whipped the cream, poured warm water into jelly moulds, cut up glacé fruits, angelica and other nonsenses. But rebellion was in the air.

'This cream's turned with the heat,' said one, after a satisfied sniffing. '*Now what, M. Chandelier?*'

It was true. The thundery weather had soured the cream. No help for it. No cream dainties for the Emperor tonight. A tragedy of the first water.

'I wonder if the jellies will set,' said another, obviously hoping they would not. 'Jellies don't like thunder *either*.'

'If they do *not*,' Chandelier was stately in reproof, 'it will be because you used too hot water—or too cool.'

Said the boy, 'I'm stewing in here, I shall faint soon.'

He went out, sat on the doorstep, watching the carriage preparations.

‘I believe we’re all *going*,’ he called back into the kitchen.

Chandelier and Pierron said, ‘Nonsense!’ loudly in chorus.

Fleury, wandering into the Emperor’s bedroom, found the portmanteaux packed, neatly ranged, coffers closed and Marchand on the point of fastening the great dressing case. Archambault and two other footmen were taking down the bed, sliding the parts into their metal containers, folding away the curtains into their special valise.

Fleury, astonished, remarked, ‘Why this hurry?’

Marchand, falsely casual, felt they ought to be ready to leave at short notice—for Brussels.

‘For Brussels—or——?’

‘For *Brussels*, monsieur,’ Marchand’s eyes were on the servants. He snapped to the green morocco case, locked it with a sharp, defiant click and slipped the key into his waistcoat pocket.

‘But the Emperor is to dine here.’

Marchand, lofty, unlike himself. ‘General Fouler agrees with me that we ought to be ready to move at any time. Before or after dinner. How about your own luggage, M. Fleury?’

A broad hint to get out, thought Fleury, and sauntered into the duty room.

Bassano and Fain were talking in low voices. The window, wide open, let in the heavy thunder-laden air.

Fain remarked, ‘What we have been through since then.’

‘Since when, monsieur?’ Fleury asked.

‘Since the Emperor landed at Fréjus from Elba. The 7th March, wasn’t it?’

‘A Wednesday, if I remember rightly,’ Bassano remarked. ‘Do you recollect the newspapers? When he landed, he was the Corsican bandit or the rebel, or the usurper. As he progressed northward towards Paris, the papers became more and more civil. On the 19th it was “General Bonaparte has

reached Fontainebleau" and on the 20th "His Majesty the Emperor will sleep tonight in his Palace of the Tuileries"!

They all laughed at the recollection.

Fleury said thoughtfully, 'I shall always like to remember that it was I who took the report of public opinion in France, which decided him to come home.'

'You did your work well,' said Fain, 'and it was work well worth doing.'

'Thank you, monsieur.' Fleury gave a little bow. Then, suddenly, light-hearted, 'I wonder whether any spy spotted me. I fancied myself as an Italian sailor—particularly my earrings. And my Italian oaths are *perfect*. But I was quite annoyed that *he* was in Paris before me. It took such a devil of a time to get a passport in Naples that I missed all the excitement in Paris.'

'We were all surprised at his quickness, we had had "Il reviendra" and "Père la Violette" all the autumn and winter. And in March—there he was—come with the violets—in Paris without a shot fired,' Fain said and walked to look out of the window.

Fleury was executing a little dance, singing softly, 'Bon! Bon! Napoléon! Va rentrer dans sa maison!'

'Quiet,' said Fain. 'Don't let these poor fellows hear you, they might not appreciate that song at this moment. What a fearful lot of them there are!'

Bassano said, 'The monarchy went down like a house of cards.'

Fain turned towards him, smiling again. 'And that night at the Tuileries!'

'Unforgettable!' said Bassano. 'He had sent a message from Fontainebleau for me and Lavalette, to meet him at the Tuileries that evening. When we arrived, *everyone* was there, in full dress with stars and orders, and the ladies in their satins and tulle were down on their knees ripping the fleurs-de-lis off the carpets to expose the golden bees. . . .'

'I wonder who discovered that the fleurs-de-lis were only patches on the old carpet?' Fain remarked.

They discussed the women of the Court circle and couldn't decide.

'Someone with a quick eye—at all events—and they were all at it except Queen Hortense.' Bassano sounded grim. 'In deepest mourning for her mother. *And yet had accepted the title of Duchesse de Saint-Leu from King Louis—she—Napoleon's Queen of Holland.*'

'An odd woman,' said Fain. 'Unstable, like her mother.'

'Nothing *like* so seductive,' said Bassano. 'Josephine was—'

In the pause, Fleury said slightly mocking, 'You, monseigneur? You? "Vénus ou Madame Maret, c'est bonnet blanc ou blanc bonnet?"'

Bassano turned pink with embarrassment.

'I know, I know. My dear wife is a most beautiful woman—and, Fleury, of a perfect fidelity. . . .'

'. . . Which is more than can be said of Josephine. . . .' Fleury murmured.

'But there was *something* about Josephine—something indefinable—impossible to resist,' Bassano added.

'The young Napoléon Bonaparte didn't try,' said Fleury. 'I've heard—'

'You have heard! Leave it there!' Bassano was abrupt.

'Nothing of the young Napoléon Bonaparte, monseigneur, but the completeness of his trust and adoration and *her* worthlessness—' He stopped abruptly, remembering Marchand's 'She gave him repose.' Perhaps . . .

'I find it a painful subject,' said Bassano. 'Let us leave the dead Empress Josephine in peace.'

'How long ago that evening seems,' said Fain pensively. 'We were all drunk with excitement—and as hungry and thirsty as could be, in actual fact, and nobody had thought about getting the kitchen staff in.'

'But someone *had* changed the sheets on the state bed, they say,' Fleury remarked.

Bassano continued his reminiscences. 'That evening! I was waiting for him in the crowd at the top of the staircase in the Tour de l'Horloge. He was positively *carried* up. He

looked like a sleep-walker, his hands outstretched, his eyes half closed—and Lavalette, coming up ahead of him, walking backwards, trying to protect him from being crushed. Lavalette was saying—quite idiotically—over and over again, “C'est vous! C'est vous!” At any other time one might have laughed. But—not *that* night.’ He blinked, blew his nose loudly.

Fain, scribbling, muttered. ‘That was—only ninety-one days ago. *What* a lot has been packed into those days!’

‘We're back where we started,’ Fleury commented.

‘And what now?’ said Fain.

‘Now—a long and happy and peaceful reign and prosperity for France.’ Fleury's tone was assured in its defiance. And then, dropping into a practical voice, ‘I *should* like something to eat.’ The others agreed.

Marie was sitting, listless, at the kitchen table, alone. The kitchen staff were all on the orchard wall again, watching some troops, she told him wearily. Prussians, perhaps—she didn't know. . . .

He looked at her compassionately, ‘Poor little girl, you are tired out.’

She agreed—and so bewildered. Did it *mean* anything? All this rushing about, this shouting, this arguing, those boys, knocking one another about for small matters. Did it *mean* anything?

It meant a great deal, he told her gently, more than he could explain now.

She didn't want *any* explanations. Her head was aching . . . she only wanted to be left alone . . . and to sleep . . . sleep. . . .

He stood beside her, helpless, suddenly loving her in a protective way and, putting out a hand, touched her hair.

‘*Don't*—please.’ She flinched away, her deep blue eyes, normally so appealing, suddenly hard with anger. ‘I don't want to be touched—by you.’

The rebuff was unexpectedly painful. He smiled ruefully at his own emotions, said, ‘Do you think you could find us something to eat? We should be so grateful.’

'When M. Chandelier comes in, I will tell him. I am in charge of the mutton.' She smiled faintly. '*That* is most important.'

Was this dismissal? He stood, looking down at her, hands clenched in his pockets. To touch her! How he longed to touch her! Only a brotherly caress—perhaps a brotherly kiss. His lips and throat were dry, his blood raced. . . . This was absurd. He must not make a fool of himself over a mere maid-servant . . . over . . . a jewel of a woman . . . a Queen . . . an Empress. . . .

He stood very still, crushing down his emotions . . . but they remained unconquered. . . . Reality came to ruin his feverish, idyllic thoughts. . . . The Prussians. . . .

The kitchen filled again with the clamour of argument. Certain fact was that the Prussians were in sight—thousands of them!

'Lobau's infantry has retreated to Planchenoit!'

'We saw them on the road from the Bois de Paris!'

'Now they're hidden by the little hills round the church.'

'If *only* those hills weren't there, we could see properly.'

'We *shall* see them—soon enough.' An unfamiliar voice, that of a coachman, standing at the yard door. 'There have been bullets—on the turnpike road—between here and Rossomme.'

'Let's hope they killed some of the deserters,' a boy said savagely.

Pierron reproved him.

'Serve 'em right,' the boys exclaimed more angrily.

'But the cavalry . . .' said another. 'They can't fail, and after they've finished off the English, the Emperor can deal with the Prussians.'

Fleury, for once hesitant, inquired whether the gentlemen could have a meal sent into the duty room. Chandelier thought he might manage a tray of cold food. The kitchen fire was entirely occupied by the pans for the preparation of the Emperor's dinner. It wasn't, but Fleury meekly agreed that, of course, only the *Emperor's* dinner really mattered. . . .

PART 7

The cavalry of France

‘Stand firm, 95th'; what would they say in England if we should be beaten?’

Wellington to the 1st Battalion, the Rifle corps, which had withstood eleven cavalry charges. About half past six on the evening of 18th June.

‘Gentlemen, perhaps you do not know which is the best cavalry of Europe . . . it is the cavalry of France. . . .’

Wellington to his officers after experiencing the audacity and perseverance of the French cavalry at Waterloo.

MAIN had stood silent at the duty room window for a long time. Eventually he said quietly, 'Come and look.'

Fleury came. '*Cavalry* uniforms amongst the wounded,' he said. 'Perhaps we might get some news from them. . . .'

They went together to the front door, watched for a while, with dismay growing greater at every moment. In low tones they agreed how much worse it must be to drag along wounded in body armour. Not easy to unbuckle a cuirass at the best of times, impossible to drag off thigh-length boots for oneself and now—exhausted with heat, in pain perhaps—crippling to walk in, almost beyond the strength of all but the most doggedly determined.

Fleury thought: degrading too, when you had started out, resplendent in vivid colour, gleaming metal, gay plumed helmet, conscious that you personified the training, the determination and the *élan* of the cavalry of France.

Most of the men went by in silence, but the lightly wounded had breath to curse and expatriate on their misfortunes.

Scraps of incoherent talk drifted to the civilians in the doorway.

' . . . Ground's crammed. How could we deploy? . . . English fire awful. Point blank. Grape. Ever met *that* before? . . . In Spain. . . . But not so fierce . . . Wasn't there . . . Awful . . . and in this heat . . . Charged four times—five perhaps . . . I lost count . . . Mad horses—rushing about, ruining the formations . . . Couldn't avoid them . . . The English guns . . . And *after* the guns, those damned Redcoats on the level. Solid squares. Three ranks . . . One minute you see a line—next minute it's a square . . . *They*

said the Redcoats were *slow*. Sacred Name! . . . Awful. I can't go on. A voice sobbing. I *can't* go on . . . What have *you* to complain of—now? Out of it all? . . . Mon Dieu—useless. Those bayonets—a hedge. Walk round them, fire a pistol—*they* don't care—*they* don't budge. . . . I got this wound—from a bayonet—shameful. . . . Throwing us away. . . . How *can* we charge when we can't gain—impetus—on the level? . . . What's 'impetus'? . . . Just a word. I heard our colonel use it. No distance in which to gain impetus. . . . I know what he *means* anyway. . . . No chance . . . and this heat. . . . It can't go on like this. . . . *We* cut into one of the squares. . . . So did *we*. . . . No infantry support. We're useless . . . we've been *wrecked*—and all for nothing.'

A cracked voice attempted humour, "It's a long way to Carcassonne".

No one enjoyed that old joke, but someone cursed and said, 'Don't remind me of Russia!'

'Not a yard to move in—crazy.'

An officer said bitterly, 'I saw infantry—a whole division—over on the left—doing absolutely nothing.'

'There you are? What did I say?'

'Traitors in this, I expect. Think of Bourmont and his whole staff deserting—three days ago.'

'I wonder what *he* told old Blücher? . . .'

'Stop that!' said another officer, very grim.

'Only three days ago, was it? Seems like eternity!'

'This'll never end . . . till everyone's *dead*. . . .'

'Stop that talk!' The officer again.

'Sacred Name! This damned cuirass . . . help me. . . .'

'Did you see the Emperor?'

'No, where?'

'Down in the hollow, reforming the infantry. Some gold braid cut in half beside him.'

'They said, Devaux—artillery of the Guard.'

'The rest of the heavies are going in. Kellermann's and Guyot's.'

'Will les gros talons do any better than *us*?' shouted an angry voice. 'Better than the *light* cavalry of the Guard?'

'Oh, you light cavalry!' a sergeant in a stained dark green dolman retorted.

The other said, 'Sorry, copain, you're Milhaud's, I see. Done good work today.'

'Yes, the 4th, Colonel Habert, Dubois' brigade.'

Another put in, 'And I'm the 7th, Travers. A marvel, that man.'

'We've got the whole of Milhaud's here!' jibed the light cavalryman.

The other two growled and slouched on.

'The English are nearly done for,' said a lightly wounded man, also of Milhaud's. 'The heavies will finish them off.'

'Will they?' Another of the light cavalrymen.

'Why doesn't the Emperor use the *infantry* of the Guard?'

'Le Tondu always saves his precious Guard till the end.'

'Nom de Dieu! I'm parched. I can't . . .' an exhausted man stumbled, fell and a comrade, hauling him up, dragged him on. 'Nearly there, copain.'

Farther back, others, less fortunate, had fallen and sat or lay groaning, with no one to notice them, slipped into unconsciousness and sometimes death.

'Just like Spain,' said an infantryman. 'Wellington always knew his job.'

Others agreed.

'It's Talavera.'

'Or Busaco.'

'Take your choice. It's Wellington.'

'And his goddams.'

'Nothing in Spain could have been worse than the devils in that farm La Haye—something. King George's Germans.'

'Sainte!' Someone gave a cracked laugh. 'The Devil's own.'

'They *are* devils! Nothing will break *them*.'

'They said the place wasn't fortified—but it is,' an infantryman leaning on a comrade said in a faint voice.

'And it's a furnace,' said the comrade.

Someone said bitterly, 'Bran and iron filings in the cartridges, they say.'

'Traitors all over the place,' said a third. 'Like Bourmont . . .'

'Who are you?' A red Lancer inquired suspiciously. 'You sound like traitors yourselves.'

'Sorry, copain, I'm all in,' the first man whispered and slipped to the ground in a huddle. The other two heaved him up and carried him on.

'We're d'Erlon's corps,' one threw over his shoulder in a sour voice. 'Quiot's division. 54th of the Line, Colonel Charlet—if you really want to know. Couldn't get back before. My pal is in a bad way. Had to carry him most of the way.'

A sudden spatter of bullets danced on the road. Fain and Fleury instinctively recoiled.

'Name of a name!' a tall cavalryman in stocking feet exclaimed. 'Where did *they* come from?'

'Out of the sky, mon cher.' The white-faced friend limping beside him, managed a grin. 'The usual direction.'

And another, 'They said, farther back, that it's the Prussians.'

'Sang Dieu! Are the Prussians here too?'

'Didn't you expect them, Gascon?'

'Where, anyway?' said another.

'Over there . . .' a vague gesture.

The pages and some of the kitchen boys had gathered to watch, wide-eyed, sobered into silence.

A man started shrieking . . . 'The Prussians! The Prussians! And they told us—Grouchy . . .' An officer knocked him senseless into the ditch with the hilt of his sabre. 'We want no nonsense here,' he said staring round at the pale, unshaven faces. 'No nonsense here,' and sheathed the sabre with a clang.

The men, muttering, stumbled on.

' . . . Prussians—and they told us Grouchy . . .'

' . . . *Not* Grouchy. . . .'

The news passed quickly ' . . . *Not* Grouchy! . . .'

One of the pages started to cry. 'I never thought . . . I don't want to be killed. . . . I want . . . to go *home*.'

Fleury wheeled round, seized him by the shoulder, marched him into the house. 'Tais-toi, pleurard! What harm can come to you here—in the Emperor's headquarters? Tais-toi!'

He hustled the boy towards the stairs. 'Get out of the way!' His comrades, white-faced, stood obstinately in the doorway, in a close-packed group. They were embarrassed, ashamed—afraid of following his example.

Pierron wanted someone to help to lay the dinner table. Marie came, glad of some simple occupation, something that was normal on this extraordinary day. Together they set everything as carefully as for luncheon.

Guns were roaring and shaking the house from all directions at once, it seemed. She remarked on it in a timid voice. Pierron reassured her. 'Very loud—but mostly our own. Get a cloth and polish these glasses, missy, my dear.'

Major Duuring passed through the house, ordered all civilians to remain indoors. To Bassano he explained, 'There is no immediate danger—it is merely a precaution, monseigneur,' and then, 'I may have to use my Chasseurs with greater severity against the deserters. There are even some officers amongst them. We shall hope to turn them back by—persuasion—but if not . . .'

He had commandeered a couple of guns of the Horse Artillery, retreating towards Genappe intact and had stationed them in the orchard within sight of a platoon of his own Chasseurs. His curt orders to the gunners reached the two laying the dinner table. 'There are two columns advancing from the Chantelet wood. Load with grape and do not fire till I return to give the order.'

'He's imagining things,' said the gunner officer caustically, 'and I'm not taking orders from *him*.' He in turn gave a sharp order. Within minutes the guns were limbered up, swung round, and driven out of the yard.

Fleury, still at the front door, saw them disappearing towards Genappe and saw Major Duuring's thunder-black

face. He had just threatened to shoot an officer. For the next few minutes he was everywhere at once, issuing orders in a sharp, cracked voice. He had suddenly taken command. Even Coignet was obeying him and at his order got the waggon with the Imperial treasure under way, shouting to the driver. 'Genappe—as fast as you can.'

'Fast? Through this crowd?'

'Get on!'

Fain, watching, said to Fleury, 'This means we civilians are nothing but a nuisance now. Well, we, too, have a duty. To stay where we are, until ordered away—by a higher authority.'

In the dining-room Pierron was polishing a coffee pot.

'The Emperor always takes coffee after dinner.'

In the kitchen Chandelier, regarding the mutton with professional affection, basted it for the tenth time.

The boys, nervous, stood about idle, rebellious.

'We shall be gone before any of this beastly dinner is served, if you ask *me*,' one remarked.

'I do *not* ask you,' Chandelier retorted. 'Get on with stirring that soup and *don't let it stick to the pan*.'

Fleury and Fain still stood at the front door.

There were wounded infantrymen of Lobau's corps coming in now, men of Line regiments in blue with varying coloured facings. They were equally dirty, weary, hungry and thirsty, but more cheerful than the cavalrymen. Hot work—the stifling day—the Prussians tough fighters—but not much *head*—in fact, really stupid—the village down there was a hell of a place—but the Emperor had sent in Duhesme, the brave Duhesme with the Young Guard and fresh batteries. They would soon throw the Prussians out—their own old Mutton-Face was a wonder—the way he handled the troops retreating on the village with hardly a man lost—but—there are so few of us against what? A division? A corps? Corps, I should say. . . . But Duhesme and the Young Guard—fresh—they would be a match for the Prussians.

‘And when Grouchy comes up . . . ?’

‘Where *is* Grouchy? We thought he would be on to these Prussians hours ago.’

‘Dicu, I can’t go . . . another step . . . leave me . . . ?’

‘Look, here comes our good angel . . . give him a cheer, copains . . . come on!’

‘Vive le Docteur Larrey!’

‘Larrey!’

‘Lar-rey!’

The feeble effort echoed down the road.

Dr. Larrey, riding back beside his ambulance carts, waved, urged the wounded forward. ‘Courage, mes enfants, you are nearly at the dressing station. We shall see to you at once. Courage!’

Again the feeble cheer, and the final spurt. Surgeons and orderlies came to meet them.

Dr. Larrey reined in his horse at the front door. Though exhausted, he smiled as if confident, as he leaned from the saddle.

Fain and Fleury came to him. He said, gravely, ‘Our medical duties are beyond us. *No* organization can stand up to this slaughter. Hundreds of men down, wounded, being trampled to death under the horsehoofs. They haven’t a chance. *And* the generals . . . ?’ He spoke in a lowered voice. ‘So many wounded—or dead. I’ve got Guyot of the heavies and Roussel of Kellermann’s and Colbert and Lheritier of the light in this convoy. There’s Dubois, Travers, Wathier, all of Milhaud’s—and half a dozen others coming in the next. Lallemand’s at La Belle Alliance—daren’t move him. He was wounded riding beside the Emperor—hours ago—Devaux was cut in half—riding the *other* side of him. The Emperor is taking his usual frightful risks. If he dies . . . ?’

Fain and Fleury murmured incoherent comments.

Larrey said, more loudly, ‘I must get on to see to my poor children. . . .’

They watched the ambulances pass, saw the wounded generals lifted down.

'Lheritier has been wounded in every campaign since Marengo,' Fain remarked solemnly. He sent Fleury into the duty room to give Bassano the bad news.

Bassano was calmly discussing methods of work with Authéry, who, examining his shirt frill with great attention, seemed uninterested. The Portfolio was sitting in the background, looking impersonal, as always.

Bassano heard Fleury in grave silence. It was sad about the generals. He didn't know many personally, but they had fine reputations—and bad for morale too. . . . But . . . there were, no doubt, many talented men left. . . .

Fleury returned to Fain and exclaimed, 'How *can* he sit in there . . . talking about methods of *clerical work* . . . with all this going on? Has he no imagination . . . *no* anxiety . . . no feelings? . . .'

Fain said soberly, 'He's *torn* with anxiety and struggling to hide the fact. Do you think a man could serve the Emperor for *fifteen* years—as he has—utterly selflessly—without anxiety *now*? Your experience of the Emperor is so short. . . .'

'. . . But it was near and personal and . . . deep . . .' Fleury broke in. 'A few days can *mean* a lifetime. . . .'

'In a way—perhaps . . . but in another way—not.'

They were silent. Then Fain said, 'If *only* I had a good excuse for riding forward to La Belle Alliance.'

Fleury, to ease the tension, laughed. 'You, M. le Baron, *always* at the post of duty. You propose to desert *now*!'

Fain frowned. 'Flippancy is out of place, Fleury. Why cannot you remember *that*?'

'But *I* wanted to go this morning and you said you would need me for *copying*.'

'So I shall. The Bulletin will have to go tonight.'

'Another pretty fairy-tale for Paris.'

Bassano came to join them. The pages stood back for him to pass, some gladly retreated into the passage, but most edged round him to move farther into the road. Fleury wondered how Bassano had managed to keep so clean and

neat all day. His own hands were filthy and his hair in a tousel.

'The Bulletin of Friday will be being read at the theatres this evening,' remarked Fain.

'I wonder what's on at the Comédie?' Bassano said.

'The George as Clytemnestra in *Iphigenia in Aulis*,' Fain answered promptly. 'I wish I were there—in one way.'

'M. Fain—you a playgoer?' Fleury teased.

'I am a devotee of the George. A pity she deserted us for so long to act in Russia. A superb actress, since she was sixteen and that's—let me see—at least twelve years ago.'

'She was—so I've heard—once one of the Emperor's . . .' Fleury remarked.

'She was—and lasted a long time. A nice girl, the George. She was very good for him; gave him gay companionship as well as—other things. He was so serious and hard-working, it did him good to be teased.'

'The Emperor—*teased*!'

'Yes, in the good old days of the Consulate.'

'M. Fain, not for the first time, I have to remind you that you are only *one* year older than I am. What do *you* remember of the good old days?'

'While I was studying the best artistes at the Comédie, you were, no doubt, haunting the Gaieté and the Ambigu and such-like.'

'But the good old days! Let me sit at your knee, Grand-papa, and hear the tales you have to tell.'

Bassano interrupted, smiling. 'Young men! Young men! I *knew* the good old days, and good they were! France rejuvenated, reconciled with herself, Frenchmen of all political opinions, rallying to her service, after those ten years of fearful upheaval. And all founded on the vision, the faith, the determination and the creative genius of the young Napoléon Bonaparte. . . .' He paused, sighed.

'And you were there—in it all, monseigneur?' Fleury was deferential.

'I was Secretary to the Consuls after Brumaire—half your life away, Fleury. Can you recite the months of the Republi-

can calendar?' He smiled. 'Of course not. It has been dead nearly ten years, and why should we remember it? A detail of a passing phase of madness—of a violent sickness—those years of revolution. Some of the trappings were needlessly preserved years after the sickness was cured. But the Consulate! Fear banished, spring in the air, the joy of friendship, constructive work, the prospect of peace. . . .' He sighed, again looking at the ground, then raised his head, stiffened. 'But whatever the task—we have to go *on*. To serve is the supreme duty and honour.'

They stood in silent agreement, a long time.

The wounded continued in an unending stream. Their muttered remarks, curses, jibes, complaints always ending on the theme: 'Thirsty . . . dead tired . . . can't go on . . .' and 'Where's Grouchy?'

At length Bassano said abruptly, 'What a massacre of brave men! I can't bear this any longer,' and went back to the duty room.

Fain and Fleury stayed. The pages had gleaned the news that infantry had gone in in support of the heavy cavalry, Bachelu's division and a brigade from Foy's. 'The Brigadier is dead, they say.'

'And Foy's wounded.'

'I heard someone say he's not even been in action yet.'

'At least *two* flags have been captured.'

'They *all* want to know where Grouchy is.'

'Do *you* know, M. le Baron, where Grouchy is?'

Fain looked grim. 'No—nor does anyone. But the messenger who went at half past one . . .'

'I know, monsieur, the one who seemed . . . who had . . .'

'*Two* glasses of brandy, on an empty stomach,' Fleury put in. 'He will certainly have reached Marshal Grouchy before now.'

'But—why *don't* we see him or hear him, monsieur?'

'We shall—soon.' Fleury sounded confident. 'You can tell that to anyone who asks. Better to lie . . .' he said under his breath, looking at Fain, who shrugged.

Now a fresh wave of wounded from the Planchenoit road joined the main procession.

‘We’ve been in and out of that blasted village I don’t know how many times.’

‘Swarms of those Prussian devils, cutting prisoners’ throats.’

‘They hung some of the sharpshooters of the Young Guard.’

‘Cursed devils!’

‘God—I’m thirsty . . . this awful heat.’

Another, lightly wounded and more cheerful, ‘The Emperor has sent two battalions of the Old Guard. I heard their drums beating the Charge.’

‘I *saw* them. Pelet’s leading them.’

‘Ah—that’s something like it.’

‘But there are a terrible lot of Prussians.’

‘What matter? The Guard is a match for a whole army of Prussians.’

‘Fine sight, the Guard on the move.’

‘I’m all in—I can’t . . .’

‘Come on, copain, only a few steps now.’

‘If he uses the Guard against the damned Prussians, what’s left for *our* battle?’ a cavalryman demanded.

‘Not *all* the Guard,’ someone reassured him.

A boy from the kitchen dashed up to Fain. ‘The Old Guard have done it, monsieur. Just twenty minutes it took them to clear Planchenoit of the Prussians. A Chasseur has told us . . .’ and he dashed away again.

‘*Vive la Garde!*’ The pages plunged into the road, cheering.

The wounded paused to hear the news. It passed quickly down through the crowd and the men shuffled onwards more determinedly. The Guard was beginning to show its mettle.

‘*Vive la Garde!*’

To celebrate, the pages fell on young Cambacérès again, maddeningly superior in the knowledge that *he* might be sent for at any moment.

'No one of you will be fit to go on duty if you don't behave,' Fain said severely, eyeing their torn clothes and freshly bleeding scratches. 'There is to be no more squabbling or fighting today.'

In a low tone to Fleury he added, 'I wonder where Turenne is? I haven't seen him for hours. It's his business to keep these youngsters in order.'

'He's probably doing what *you* should be, monsieur, quietly reading a book—somewhere—perhaps upstairs.'

'Fleury, sometimes you are past bearing . . . and sometimes you're not. Go and look for Turenne, there's a good chap. Tell him the pages are getting out of hand—and are *his* affair.'

The first person he saw was Marie, sitting on her bed at the far end of the landing. Her face was pinched and white with tiredness, her eyes pathetic with bruised shadows beneath them. She took no notice when he sat beside her, put an arm round her.

'Well?' he said at length.

'It's no good. I can't . . .'

'Can't what?'

'What do you think is happening to—*Him*?'

'He's tremendously busy. Giving orders, riding about reorganizing . . .'

'Reorganizing. What is that?'

'Rearranging the regiments when they get mixed up—that sort of thing.'

'But—all those wounded. Surely all the soldiers—are wounded—or dead by now.'

'Nonsense!' He tried not to hold her tightly, longed to kiss her, refrained. This was hard work. 'There are *hundreds* not wounded—and there's the Guard. Hardly any of it has even been *used* yet.'

'You all seem so certain about the Guard. Is it *so* wonderful?'

'Every man's a walking miracle. Brave, strong, skilful. In a *mass* they're *quite* unbeatable.'

'How can you be so sure?'

'Because they never *have* been beaten. I promise you. You'll see. By the way, I was sent to look for M. de Turenne. Have you seen him lately?'

'The gentleman in the beautiful scarlet coat? He's lying down. There's no pillow and no feather bed on the frame—but he said he didn't mind. He wanted to rest his back.'

'Sacred Name! I'll rest his back for him. Where is he?'

Fleury banged on the door indicated and went in. Two voices, the finicky and the strong, sounded through the shut door.

Fleury reappeared, furious. 'What a creature! He has packed his valise—*one* can't be *too* well prepared for all eventualities—and *now* *one* is reading *one's* love letters—written on pink gilt-edged paper. *Some* woman has very poor taste.'

He was still exclaiming when musket fire, alarmingly close, rattled the window panes. Marie clung to him. To feel that he was protecting her, made the noise remarkably agreeable.

'It's all right,' he said. 'Nothing can hurt us here.' Quite illogical of course, he thought, but women—this *woman* must be comforted.

Turenne appeared, valise in hand, looking frightened. 'What d'you think?' he queried.

'That there are five hundred or more Chasseurs—to protect us here and we needn't think,' said Fleury curtly. 'You can go down and find out what's happening, can't you, if you really want to know?'

Alone with Marie again, his arm round her, he tried to calm her.

She was shivering violently, could bear no more, she said. 'Oh why, why did I stay here? The Boucquéaus are safe, in Couture St. Germain. If *only* I had gone with them. . . . They're right out of this awful battle. . . . Why? . . .'

She was crying against his shoulder and he gloried in it. She seemed not to notice the light touch of his lips on her

hair, nor his hold of her so slight . . . so heart-achingly slight. . . .

Turenne's face showed itself at the top of the stairs and the moment's happiness was over. 'Will you be kind enough to come down, M. Fleury.'

Silently cursing affairs in general and in particular Turenne, Fleury went.

The noise of firing had ceased. The gentlemen were in solemn conclave in the duty room, gathered round General Fouler and Major Duuring's adjutant.

'Well, that seems to be all over quite successfully,' Fleury remarked. 'I thought at first we were going to be mixed up in the battle.'

Bassano frowned. 'This is no time for flippancy, Fleury. You have been told *that* before.'

'I beg your pardon, monseigneur. I was merely stating facts.'

'I wished to tell you that General Fouler and Major Duuring have sent the Emperor's post-chaise away and M. Marchand with the Emperor's personal baggage and valuables is to leave at once, as well as the kitchen staff and their equipment, the pages, and the rest of the baggage waggons—as a precautionary measure.'

'And—er—what about *us*?' Turenne said apprehensively.

'M. Fain, the Portfolio and I will remain for the present. You may go if you wish, monsieur, and take Authéry with you.'

Turenne flushed, 'Perhaps—er . . .'

Authéry said nothing.

'I certainly shall stay,' said Fleury. 'If possible—to the end—whatever happens.'

Major Duuring's adjutant saluted them and went away, saying, 'I am to go forward with information for the Emperor.'

Pierron, summoned to Bassano, and informed of developments, was thunder-struck. Who would serve the Emperor? He, Pierron, had never deserted his post before. As for Chandelier! . . . He would be extremely put out! Mon-

seigneur must realize—such remissness might lose them both their positions in the Imperial Household—monseigneur must realize that they had wives and families to keep and were no longer very young . . . monseigneur . . . must realize. . . .

Bassano, hand raised, arrested the flood of protest. 'These are orders, maître, from a higher authority. . . . Tell the kitchen staff to pack and prepare themselves. . . .'

The kitchen was already in uproar. Under the lash of Captain Coignet's tongue there was nothing to do but obey. Scrambling pans, silver, cases of wine, pell-mell into the baskets, the boys were running back and forth to the waggons. A carriage came round and Marchand, calm, controlled, but haggard, directed the footmen in the stowing of the Emperor's baggage. He carried out the empty sword-case and the precious dressing-case himself. Coignet was swearing at the slowness of the servants. The road must be kept clear for the ambulance carts. M. Marchand must be off at once!

'The Emperor's bed?' Marchand's foot was on the step.

'I'll see it packed on to the mule. Quick! Get along!' The valet, with a last desperate glance at Fleury, got in, flung himself back on the seat. The door slammed. Given the whip, the horses leaped forward.

In the yard, the packing of the kitchen waggon completed, the boys were pushed in, to fling themselves in a heap under the tilt. The heavy vehicle jolted into movement and Coignet shouted orders for the journey. Then it was the pages' turn. Protesting loudly at the indignity of flight, they were bundled into their carriages and were driven away, still yelling remonstrances from the windows.

Other carriages filed up to the door.

'Now, gentlemen,' Coignet was a shade more deferential.

Bassano, dignified, declined to go. The Emperor might need him. Fain and Fleury also refused, and, hesitant, scarlet with embarrassment, Turenne added a half-hearted protest.

Coignet, nonplussed, said, 'As you will—but later may be

too late,' and sent the carriages back to the yard. He stumped off, furious, leaving the civilians in a group in the doorway. The broken, weary men streamed past. The sun, westering, struck full upon the road.

Bassano sighed and, at length, said, 'A lovely evening. I wonder what my wife's doing? I wish . . .'

A man in dreadful case, slipped from the support of a comrade, pitched forward on his knees, exclaimed, choked and died, in a vomit of blood, at their feet. Turenne recoiled, exclaimed. The others, in pity, pride, and homage, remained motionless.

The clock struck seven.

P A R T 8

Victory is a trollop

‘Blücher or night.’

Wellington. About seven o’clock on the evening of 18th June.

FLEURY, his mind swinging between unreasoning hope and almost certain despair, stood at the open window of the duty room. The evening sun dazzled his eyes; he was hot and dirty and tired, but he hardly noticed these physical discomforts. Bassano and Fain sat at the table, equally weary, filled with similar emotions, stubbornly held in leash. Bassano looked suddenly very old, Fain was white and drawn.

'I feel suspended between Heaven and earth,' Fleury said at last.

'That is what we are,' said Bassano, 'though I had not thought to use the metaphor of Mahomet's coffin.' He tried to smile. . . .

There broke upon their despondency the sound of feeble cheers from the wounded men passing. The cheers became words: 'C'est fait! C'est fait! Ça va! Ça va!'

'Le rougeaud!'

'Le rougeaud l'a fait!'

'Vive le rougeaud!'

Fleury ran out. 'Ney? What has Ney done? Pour l'amour de Dieu. . . .' But no one took notice of him, a mere civilian. They were waving, gesticulating, embracing, even dancing—men whom a moment before had seemed all but dead of their misfortunes. The chorus came up the road from the battlefield, 'C'est fait—le rougeaud!'

Major Duuring's adjutant was making what haste he could through the press. His horse, out of hand, reared, knocked over a man who, sprawling, grinned happily at the officer and waved him onwards.

Fleury ran to meet him, seized the bridle rein.

‘Pour l’amour de Dieu! . . .’

‘They’ve done it! They’ve done it!’

‘What?’ Fleury roared.

‘Taken La Haye Sainte! The English centre is wide open. . . . We can’t fail. . . . Name of a Name! This is a day!’

Fleury all but dragged him from his horse, hustled him into the duty room.

‘Tell us, tell us! Monseigneur, c’est parfait! Fain, c’est parfait! Grand Dieu! C’est parfait!’

‘I must report to Major Duuring first, gentlemen. . . .’ The adjutant was breathless.

‘Damn Major Duuring! Portfolio, run for Major Duuring, run, man, *run*!’

‘Fleury, my friend, who are you to give orders to the Portfolio. . . .?’

‘I’m sorry, monseigneur—but . . . oh, tell us, tell *us*.’

‘It should be all over—any time now. . . .’

Major Duuring marched in, the Portfolio at his heels. Even he looked pink with excitement as he retired to his chair in the corner.

The adjutant saluted his superior officer.

‘The Emperor is highly satisfied, M. le Commandant. His message is “Tell M. le Commandant to hold firm.” His Majesty counts on us to hold the turnpike road against any further attacks from the Prussians advancing from Planchenoit. His Majesty will soon be able to give his personal and undivided attention to the Prussians.’

Duuring nodded. ‘We shall do that. And await His Majesty’s arrival. So the attack on Wellington goes well?’

How precise these military men were! Why couldn’t they get down to the really exciting news? Fleury flung up his hands.

Fain frowned at him.

‘According to plan, M. le Commandant.’

Duuring, ignoring the civilians, asked for details.

It appeared that the capture of La Haye Sainte had

enabled Marshal Ney to bring up a battery of horse artillery and direct close, accurate fire on the allied troops holding the ridge both east and west along the line of the Ohain road.

‘The tables are turned, M. le Commandant. *We* are now firing on *them* with grape—at point-blank range.’

Fleury burst out, ‘But are you *certain*? How do you know? The fog . . . ?’

The adjutant waited for a sign from Duuring as Fleury again implored him, ‘Don’t you understand? We’ve waited here all day, with only scraps of news . . . and rumours . . . and the wounded . . . their stories. . . .’

Duuring smiled to his junior who, released from military discipline, laughed gaily.

‘Someone lent me a glass. Said I deserved a treat! You can see the line of fire easily now. From Papclotte and La Haye, through La Haye Sainte to Hougoumont.’

‘Oh, for a *map*,’ muttered Fain.

‘It’s quite simple.’ The adjutant was sketching with his finger on the table. ‘Papclotte and La Haye farm, the English forward posts—here, to the right of our line. Durutte’s division has taken them. To the left the château of Hougoumont, still burning—but *here*—a finger planted firmly—in the *centre*—you can see our infantry *behind* La Haye Sainte—attacking along the crossroads from—Ohain’—his hand swept right—‘to Braine l’Alleud’—a leftward sweep.

‘Wonderful!’ Bassano breathed.

‘The English aren’t only shaken,’ the adjutant went on, ‘they’re *broken*. We could *see* them streaming back into the forest in their hundreds.’

‘And what will happen now?’ Fain asked.

‘The Emperor will lead in the Guard. He *must*, it’s the moment for the coup de grâce.’

‘Ah!’ A long and general sigh of relief from the civilians.

Major Duuring, observed guardedly, ‘That movement *should* end the battle in our favour.’

The civilians exclaimed that surely it *must*, and the

adjutant added that there were nine battalions of the Old Guard, fresh and ready, formed up behind La Belle Alliance. 'Five thousand men! Itching to advance!'

Duuring said, soldierly calm, 'We have our own job to do,' and the two officers went away.

Conversation petered out in sighs and incoherent exclamations. Presently Fleury said, 'How Chandelier would have loved this!'

'He'll soon have the news,' Fain commented.

And Bassano, 'What a lovely evening.'

'Even M. le Baron Fain would rather be here than at the Comédie?' Fleury hazarded.

'Much rather.'

Bassano said, 'We asked for a meal—some time ago—and now I believe I really *am* hungry and I *know* I'm thirsty. Do you suppose that girl—if she is still here—could get us something?'

Fleury suggested the famous saddle of mutton.

'Certainly not! *That* must be kept for the Emperor.'

'I hope it's not *over*-cooking,' said Fain. 'Is she looking after it?'

'Perhaps she could find us something—cold chicken—or cheese would do,' Bassano hazarded.

Marie was still in the kitchen. She had heard Major Duuring's adjutant say that everything was all right now. Warned by Fleury that the Emperor might be arriving at any moment, she looked at the mutton again. It was doing nicely, she said.

'You'll have to serve the Emperor.'

'Oh—*no*!'

'There's no one else.'

'Please, *please* don't tease me!'

'Indeed, my dear, I'm not teasing; only preparing you for what will be a fact—quite soon now. And meanwhile M. de Bassano finds the good news has made him hungry and thirsty. Is there anything you can bring us?'

She would try to find something—cold beef perhaps—

there had been a joint—Madame Boucquéau had cooked it—yesterday only—for *déjeuner*.

Fleury wandered out into the yard, climbed on to the wall.

To the north, smoke billowed up as from a great cauldron, yet all in that direction was strangely quiet.

From Planchenoit there was sporadic musket fire and (he listened intently) farther off, still from the north-east, surely, the rumble of steady cannon fire. Grouchy? . . . Or more Prussians? . . . Surely, Grouchy. He must have had the messenger who had left at half past one. He *must* have crossed the Dyle by now. He *must* have that difficult obstacle behind him . . . by now.

Turning westward, gazing into the sun sinking towards the steeple of Braine l'Alleud church far away, a light breeze brought him a wisp of military music, the brass and the drums—and men singing. Singing! At the end of this exhausting day! Who could be singing?

He called to General Fouler supervising the grooming of the remaining saddle horses, who came to climb up beside him.

They strained their ears. Were they imagining things? But—yes—it *was* singing.

Captain Coignet joined them, grunted, said, his ear cocked, 'Fresh troops on the march, perhaps on the Nivelles road, behind Hougoumont, if you ask *me*.' And then pausing to listen, again. 'None of *ours*; that's not a French tune.'

Fouler commented. 'Besides, we have no fresh troops except the Guard.'

Coignet growled savagely. 'What *more* d'you want? *Except* the Guard! When I was an Old Moustache myself I would have laid on his back—with one hand—any man who said to me, "*Except* the Guard." . . .'

They soothed him but he was still muttering, 'No fresh troops—*except* the Guard,' as he left them, and going, he gave a sudden harsh guffaw.

Fleury, flung back into uncertainty, was consoled by

Fouler's assurance that the Emperor was always ready for any unexpected turn of fortune in a battle. . . .

The road, in the evening light, was almost bare of wounded and the fugitives had turned back, to be in at the victorious close.

Then, round the corner from Rossomme, came a boyish rider, leading a grey Arab horse. He waved to them excitedly.

'It's Gudin with Desirée!' Fleury cried gaily.

And Gudin, shouting, 'General Fouler, please, the Emperor wants Marengo.'

Fleury yelled back, 'What's the news? Quickly!'

'The Emperor's leading in the Guard, *himself*, almost at once—all the rest are being assembled.'

Fleury and Fouler jumped down and Fleury ran through the house to meet the page, dismounting, 'What d'you mean—all the rest?'

'The army! D'Erlon's, Reille's—the cavalry—everything, everybody. Grouchy's arriving—General La Bedoyère is going along the line announcing that. It's—it's wonderful—but,' his face fell, 'I'm not to go back—*He* said so—an *order*—someone—*older*—must take Marengo . . . I'm to stay here.' He was nearly in tears. 'Not to *see* it—after all this waiting.'

He pushed past Fleury, ran upstairs.

Bassano and Fain had heard the news through the open window.

'All is happening as the Emperor said it would, at breakfast,' Bassano said comfortably. '"I shall have my artillery play, I shall order my cavalry to charge and I shall advance myself with my Guard."

'So we come to the final act of the best drama I ever saw,' said Fain with calm satisfaction.

'Better than any you ever saw at the Comédie?' Fleury queried, and added, 'But *we* shan't *see* this! You—you—don't think I could take Marengo?'

'No, I do *not*,' said Fain firmly. 'There's no place there

for unauthorized civilians. Think of the Emperor's anger—*tomorrow*—if you did go.'

Marengo went in charge of her own groom, a man half excited, half afraid, of what he might find.

'Hurry back!' Fouler called after him.

'To *think* that only a mile and a half away one can *see* everything!' Fleury groaned.

Bassano sent him to fetch their meal. Fleury, contemptuous now of such mundane notions, went to the kitchen.

Marie was sorry; there wasn't much . . . cold beef as she had said . . . and the bread was very stale . . . the remains of yesterday's loaves.

Fleury grinned. 'Quite good enough for old Stickleback!' and brought the tray to the duty room.

Bassano eyed it. 'Nothing to drink?' He sounded fretful.

Fleury, seeing the older man's exhaustion, felt contrition for his moment's scorn and went again to the kitchen. This man had followed his master dutifully through years of campaigning and had experienced unnumbered hours of torturing anxiety in his service. The loyal soul within excused the sudden apparent indifference at this supreme moment.

Marie produced the last two bottles of Boucquéau's 'passable Burgundy!'

They gathered round the table. Bassano drank thirstily, munched thoughtfully. General Fouler came in, stood, cramming a few pieces of meat and bread into his mouth, and then after a quick glass of wine, went away.

Fleury pretended to eat, drank two glasses of wine, sighed happily.

Fain said he was not hungry. He paced about to the front door, and back again, to the back door and back again.

'Why don't you sit down quietly and read a book, M. le Baron?' Fleury teased.

Fain looked steadily at his colleague shook his head, then said grimly, 'One day, Fleury, I shall tell you *exactly* what I think of you.'

'But you *have*, monsieur, *many* times.'

'This time—it will be worse—*much* worse—and all quite true.'

Fouler and Coignet brought in the groom who, dazed at the honour his special charge was to have of carrying the Emperor up the ridge to the routing of the English, could speak of nothing else. 'She looks as though she *knows*—quiet as a child's pony—but beautiful and proud . . . so proud . . .'

Patient questions got a little news from him. 'The Emperor—on Marengo—has led them all down into that valley.'

'All? All—who?'

'The Guard, messieurs, all the Guard—at least not quite *all*. There are two—I think you would call them battalions—but I don't judge numbers very well.'

'*Go on!* The Guard, led into the valley—and then?'

'Those two battalions are standing left and right of the road—a bit behind that inn, La Belle—something—near a farmhouse. Grenadiers, they were . . . left behind.'

'But the Emperor has gone down into the valley—go on from there.'

'I didn't see any more, messieurs. The fog is so thick, they were lost in it—in a few minutes.'

Sighs of disappointment. 'The General with those Grenadiers was the one in command, they say—last year—at Fontainebleau—when the Emperor . . . left—you *know*.'

'General Petit,' Fain said soberly. 'He will have a splendid memory of today to obliterate that other.' He sighed; so did Bassano.

Fouler looked stern, and Fleury puzzled. Coignet seemed as if by instinct, to stiffen to attention.

'General Petit,' Bassano said quietly, 'commanded the Guard of Honour, in the Cour du Cheval Blanc—in April last year.'

Fleury understood, Fain nodded. All hesitated to speak of that poignant scene of departure—even now, with victory in sight. Imagination could picture the Emperor, descending the great horseshoe staircase, escorted by his staff, receiving

for the last time the general salute of the massed drums of his faithful Grenadiers.

Coignet's voice, broken with emotion, said: 'He spoke to the Guard—of their victories—he kissed the Colour—he—embraced the General . . . I . . . cried . . . to see my dear Emperor . . .' he choked, his face streaming with tears.

Fleury thought: here stand two utterly loyal servants; the Minister of State and the old soldier. . . .

Typical of France. . . ?

The moment of sombre emotion passed and Fouler remarked in a practical voice that half an hour would be needed for the preparations for the launching of such an attack. Then they argued (it was a relief to argue), about the time of the adjutant's return and agreed on a quarter past seven.

Bassano, consulting his watch, exclaimed, 'Why, *now* it's nearly a quarter to *eight*.'

'Half an hour,' Fleury exclaimed, and Fouler, 'It should start at any . . .' The thunderous crash of artillery drowned the rest of the sentence.

Fleury went to the kitchen to tell Marie the good news. She listened in silence. She no longer cared about the battle.

'The mutton will soon be overcooked,' she said. 'I hope—you must be hoping the Emperor will come before it is spoilt.'

'Don't worry, he won't mind—tonight.'

She flushed, trembled at that word 'tonight'.

'Shall I stay here with you?'

'I don't know—well—perhaps—yes—please.' Not very welcoming, but he sat her on a chair, took another for himself. They were silent. Marie, listless, leaning her head on her hand, Fleury aching with suppressed excitement. The glory of it, and she not caring! The wonder of it, at the eleventh hour, and she not understanding! The crown,

the flower of victory—the prospect for the future . . . for France . . . for the Emperor. . . .

How often has he slept with victory, he thought . . . ?

The cannon roared, fiercer than at any hour of the day, five, ten, fifteen minutes: then the sound gradually died away.

She looked up at him, questioningly.

‘That must mean that *they* are on the rising ground—towards the English line—our guns might fire on them by mistake.’

He murmured to himself . . . thrilled to say it, ‘The Guard attacks!’ and, ‘A marvellous sight that must be. I would give anything to see it—what a memory to keep for life! To say, “I *saw* the charge of the Old Guard on the English line at Mont Saint-Jean”—to tell my children and my grandchildren. . . .’ Thoughtfully, he looked at her sidelong. ‘And the Emperor—on Marengo—at their head.’

‘How far—into the battle—will *He* go?’

‘Now? All the way—probably—right up to the English line, on to the ridge, beyond La Haye Sainte.’

‘Oh—no!’ Suddenly she was crying bitterly. ‘Into such danger! Supposing . . . ?’

‘You needn’t suppose. It *won’t* happen.’ He spoke roughly to reassure himself as well as her. ‘It *can’t*—not now—after all these years.’

She went on crying, and lost in his own thoughts he made no attempt to comfort her.

Through the yard door, a drum roll, faint, but long drawn out and defiant, drifted in on the evening air.

Fleury noting the sound, murmured, ‘R-rum-dum, r-rum-dum, the r-rummadum, dummadum, dum-dum.’

Coignet running, stumbling, passed the door, roared to them, ‘The Pas de Charge!’ and dashed on.

Fleury sprang up and dragging Marie by the wrist, ran after Coignet into the orchard. The drum rolls were clearer, even the sound of bugles and trumpets came faintly to them and—or did they imagine it?—the shouts of ‘Vive l’Empereur!’

Coignet standing on the wall was roaring, 'Vive l'Empereur!' to the universe.

The sun was nearly hidden by the church of Braine l'Alleud. Fleury imagined its fierce evening rays piercing the smoke over the battle-field, glinting on bayonets, helmets, drawn swords. Then, as loud, clear, sharp, the English guns opened up once more, the flash of their discharge revealed the great half circle of the English line from end to end. Like the flaming jaws of some huge red-hot vice, Fleury thought suddenly, and flinched away from the thought.

'Double-shotted,' said Coignet professionally.

'How many French soldiers are there?' Marie asked him timidly.

'Every man left standing, missy, *and* five thousand of the Guard. *And* to think that I'm not there!' he added mournfully. He went on talking, muttering to himself, describing a battle, any battle—all battles since the beginning of time, it would seem.

Marie stood quietly beside Fleury who, his fists clenched, ached with anxiety and hope. Flash and crackle and roar and roll; drums, always drums, that Pas de Charge, rippling and rolling backwards and forwards along the line of advance (Coignet had said in columns of battalions, whatever that meant).

Twilight heightened the drama; made waiting unbearable. Fleury fought with his imagination, head up, nostrils distended, trying to experience the desperate conflict. So near men clashed in dreadful mêlée, desperate, elated, cursing, killing, trampling, bleeding, dying. . . . It was useless. If you couldn't see it, you couldn't really imagine it. . . .

Did anyone mind as much as he—in those terribly long moments—that they were *not* seeing it? Yes, Coignet, who had seen fifteen years of war would mind as much.

But Coignet, the question put, said grimly, 'See it, monsieur? When you're in it you see to the end of your own nose—and no farther.'

Fleury tortured his imagination again. . . .

Men falling amidst a litter of discarded knapsacks, arms,

pouches, overturned guns; crushed by riderless horses, careering, mad with fear and wounds, men themselves trampling on wounded comrades, wounded enemies . . . on the dying and the dead, before they too fell to die.

No use, the mind boggled, the restricted civilian mind could not encompass this terrible thing . . . which could not really be happening. . . . Waiting here, in the summer twilight, nothing could be happening in the longest battle ever fought by the Emperor (Coignet had said so). Men were *not* dying . . . in hundreds . . . in the greatest triumph ever achieved by the greatest Captain of all Time (Coignet averred it—would History endorse him?). . . .

He struggled back to reality as Marie said: 'I—we ought to look at the mutton.'

They went indoors in silence.

'Oh dear—overcooked—burnt. Spoilt! What *shall* we do?' A real cry of anguish. 'Spoilt! Spoilt!'

Two loud angry voices resounded from the front door. Bassano, Fain, Fouler and Turenne were standing silent, while Dr. Larrey, white with anger, raged at General La Bedoyère.

The general was emphasizing, repeating, a message: 'It is the Emperor's *personal* order, Dr. Larrey. You are to collect in your ambulance carts such wounded as can travel and return to Genappe—at *once*.'

'You tell me to *leave* my gravely wounded! And *yet* you say all goes well for us on the ridge . . . that General Friant *himself* has come back to say that all goes well. . . . Friant, the commander of the Old Guard. . . .'

'This is a precaution, M. le Docteur, a precaution only. You have *no* choice. Major Duuring's Chasseurs will guard those remaining. Obey, if you please, monsieur—and *at once*.'

Coignet, the efficient baggage master again, appeared, a darkened silhouette, behind the group, announced that the ambulance carts were already filled and the surgeons' saddle horses coming round from the stables.

Dr. Larrey, looking La Bedoyère in the eye, cursed him and high Heaven. 'You compel me to the most cowardly act of my life! You bring me to shame after nearly fifteen years campaigning! You . . .' Words failed. He shook up-raised fists at the sky.

La Bedoyère repeated sternly, 'You have *no* choice.'

With a final furious glance at the general, with no farewell to the others, Dr. Larrey walked away. The line of carts was already moving off towards Genappe. Larrey gave an order to his assistants, mounted, and, a trim figure in his pale blue uniform and black cocked hat, reined in his horse behind the slow procession.

'I have already told you gentlemen that you are to leave.' La Bedoyère, still stern, was a trifle more polite.

Bassano said calmly, 'If Duuring's men can protect the wounded, they can protect us too. The Emperor may need us—*me*—at any moment.'

'And there may be letters to be prepared,' said Fain.

'And copied,' Fleury, who had been listening in impatient silence, put in. 'I am always needed for copying.'

'The Emperor's orders are to be obeyed, gentlemen,' La Bedoyère repeated firmly.

Fleury broke out, 'Why *should* we be deprived of the experience of victory? And Grouchy is advancing. . . .'

'We have *heard* his gunfire from the right—even here,' Fain said.

La Bedoyère, touched by a sudden shaft of light from the newly-risen moon was seen to bite his lips.

Turenne shifted his feet nervously. Fouler glanced at him with contempt.

At length La Bedoyère said slowly, 'That is not Grouchy, gentlemen. That is two more Prussian corps, one advancing towards Planchenoit, the other marching from Ohain to join up with the English left. Their patrols will be in touch by now, they may even be relieving that part of the English line.'

'But—Grouchy—the adjutant *said* you told the troops!' Bassano exclaimed.

'A blind, gentlemen, to strengthen their morale. They needed it.'

'You *lied*? The Emperor *lied*?' Fleury demanded fiercely.

'These misstatements are sometimes imperative.'

Bassano, his head sunk forward, said very low, 'I know.' Then, he straightened, threw back his head. 'We will obey, General, but we do not lose hope—or faith.'

'I shall *not* go,' said Fleury, trembling, bright-eyed with anger. 'There is more than faith or hope—there is—the third virtue—love.' His voice broke and he turned away.

The carriages, baggage already loaded, came round to the door. Turenne and Authéry mounted eagerly. Bassano and Fain still lingered. The Portfolio, impersonal shadow, stood behind them.

La Bedoyère, his point gained, mounted and galloped back towards the battle.

Bassano said, 'To desert now—how cowardly it seems!'

'Civilians are only a nuisance,' said Coignet harshly. 'If you won't get in at once, I shall send the carriages on and you can *walk* to Paris.'

'*Paris*!' Fain exclaimed.

'Or to *Hell*, if you like, messieurs.'

ENGLISH INTERLUDE II

Veteran

About half past seven on the evening of 18th June.

FRED, prone in the tall rye, seeing nothing, sneezing violently and too frequently for dignity, wondered mournfully what use the battalion had been that day.

His next instalment of the campaign story would be bare of personal incident:

At first we just stood or lay about to be shot at by the Frog batteries for two hours; they killed some of us, sometimes, but we did absolutely nothing in reply. It was maddening. To our right and south of us, the Frogs attacked the big house of Hougoumont, and Lord Saltoun (he's really our battalion) took the light companies of the Coldstream and the 3rd Foot Guards and some Nassauers (I think) away there, right from the beginning of the battle at about half past eleven. They were at it hammer and tongs all day. Then at about half past one, the Frog infantry charged Picton's division on our left beyond the crossroads (I've explained the position to you, Mamma, haven't I?) about half a mile away from us. They did it several times and Picton's men were terribly mauled. That was when Picton and Chambers were killed and Tyler wounded. We were formed in square but nothing happened. The Frogs ignored *us*—*the Guards!*

We were still in our original position, a little in front of the cart track. The 2nd battalion was to our right and behind the track, a bit sheltered by the banked-up sides of the track, but not really under cover.

For pretty well two more hours—till about half past three (your watch keeps beautiful time, Mamma) we did futile things. We stood up, in line, and the men were

kept moving two paces right, one pace left and back again. The captain said it made them feel they were doing something! Good for morale! I wonder! Then when they thought the Frog batteries had killed enough of us (not many really, Mamma) we lay down again, in square, just in case. *That* was supposed to be good for morale too! All the time we were sick of just being shot at without doing anything ourselves. Our two batteries at least had the fun of joining in firing at the Frog infantry occasionally, though they couldn't make the show the Frogs could with their heavy stuff.

After the Frog infantry's battering at Picton's, we heard that some Frog cavalry had charged them and Ponsonby's Union brigade (the heavies, Mamma) had charged in reply and they rode right up to the Great battery on the left of La Belle Alliance and even spiked some of the guns. We couldn't *see* any of this because of the smoke, but we had the news passed down the line —you get news *and* a lot of rumours that way. We heard later that the Union brigade had gone too far and had been badly cut up and had to return in disorder. Ponsonby himself was killed in that charge. *That* news came along very quickly and we were very depressed.

We had a perfectly awful ten minutes when the rumour came that the Duke was dead, but luckily, almost at once he rode along with an A.D.C., as calm as you please. The men cheered like mad and he gave the usual little salute—two fingers to the edge of his hat—and they yelled again. He's marvellous. Cool and energetic—always on the spot where there is danger. The old hands say he has always been like that, particularly those who served under him in Spain (but I won't bore you with Spain, Mamma. *I* get sick of the stories of Spain).

Then at about half past three, we got the order, 'Prepare to receive cavalry.' We did some complicated evolutions, you wouldn't understand and it doesn't matter, and there we were in hollow square again.

Front rank kneeling on the right knee, to shoot low at the horses, second rank with bayonets fixed, crouched in the charge position, third rank prepared to fire over their heads. All of us officers were inside the square so we were quite safe.

The whole field was covered with thick smoke so I really didn't know what to expect. The old hands did, of course. Two surgeons had come into the square. . . . (Perhaps better *not* tell Mama *that*.)

Suddenly the French batteries stopped firing and our own started up. 'Here they come,' said someone. We couldn't see anything at all, except occasionally our two batteries with the men stripped to the waist, working like devils at the guns. The bark and flash were simultaneous and we could watch them jumping away from the recoil every half minute or so, and then back again reloading.

Suddenly our firing stopped and from each gun the men detached a wheel and they came running, bowling it like a hoop before them, our square opened for them and they were safely in. Most of them flopped down and mopped their faces.

And there was the Frog cavalry—heavies, close behind them! Oh, I forgot, by this time Colonel Stuart . . .

(Say simply 'wounded'. Not mention the awful pulp of bleeding flesh which had been the colonel's arm nor the horrible fascination of the glimpse of Mr. Curtis with his knife prepared. . . .)

They took him to an ambulance cart in the rear in no time at all. He will be quite all right. Colonel Stables took command.

The Frog cavalry were only trotting someone said scornfully, but to me they seemed to come up to us pretty quickly. Oddly enough it was really quite a relief. The Frog batteries had stopped, of course, for fear of killing their own men and the cavalry couldn't make any impression on us. They just rode round and

round us. Sometimes one of them would fire a pistol at an officer or slash at a bayonet with his sword, but every time our men killed a trooper's horse, the trooper was helpless and ran off as quickly as he could go.

They kept on coming and coming. I must say they're tremendously brave. Their horses are pretty poor, but they kept at it. Two cuirassiers actually got into our square but the colonel killed one, and Robin Adair the other. We lost count of their charges—about a dozen, I should think, and of course *some* men got killed. (Not mention Colonel Stables' death—just say Stables was out of action pretty quickly and Colonel D'Oyly took over.)

(Nor must Fred's story contain the episode of Robin Adair, with his leg smashed and, in a lull taken to the rear to Mr. Gilder, nor Robin's joke (typical of him) as he died: 'Take your time, Mr. Carver.' Captain Burgess? *His* smashed leg? Yes, mention him, because he was patched up and hopped into the ambulance cart without help.)

The weather was very hot and the square got very stuffy, what with the cartridge smoke and all of us packed close together. (No need to mention that the wounded often waited a long time, moaning in pain, before they could be got away nor that the dead lay where they fell and were forgotten and trampled on. Mamma would think one callous—and so one became after three hours of it.)

We were all dead tired by half past six although we had done nothing but stand or lie on that bit of ground since half past eleven. The people who were really fighting were much worse off; the Coldstream and the others at Hougoumont and Major Baring and the King's German Legion sticking it out in La Haye Sainte. *They* were in it up to the hilt.

The Frogs must have been tired too, because at about the same time they stopped coming at us. Even their batteries eased off.

Jim and Dick sat down with the Colours across their knces, said their arms were dropping off with holding them poised in the supports all the time (they *are* heavy, I tried holding one for a bit—when the colonel wasn't looking—the Colour sergeants didn't protest, though they looked furious).

Bull, who had a thigh wound and had been bandaged up, had to go off in a cart. He was furious, but as he couldn't *stand*, he wasn't any use. Bacchus had a shoulder wound and was gloating, 'You can fight with only one *arm*,' he said, 'but not with only one *leg*! Poor old Bull!'

The heat got worse towards evening, sultry like Friday. I was stewed. I wished I dared unhook my collar but I didn't. . . . The men had, of course, and who could blame them? A sergeant told me the Frogs are luckier than we are. They have quite loose, roomy tunics and their trousers are much more loosely cut than ours. The sergeant had pinched a pair in Spain from a dead Frog and found them excellent in wear. Finished the campaign in them, he said. The Duke apparently doesn't mind what his soldiers wear except they mustn't wear blue coats like the Frogs.

We thought we were in for a quiet time and were standing about talking. That Gronow—I told you about him—the Taffy fellow—was telling a long story about the passage of the Bidassoa (Spain again!) and the pleasant winter he spent at St. Jean de Luz in '13-14. And then tales of Lady Cowper and Lady Jersey. I wonder if he really *does* know all these fine people? The other fellows treat him with a sort of deferential good humour, as though, although he's such a card, they respect him. His royal blood, I suppose.

All of a sudden there was a great noise of trumpets and bugles and drums and 'Vive l'Empereur!' Obviously the Frog infantry and cavalry were at it again on our left. We began to get flank fire from that direction, and so did some of Halkett's people, the 30th and the 73rd, and a battalion of the Sweeps, our next neighbours

towards the crossroads. The news came along that Baring and the K.G.L. had had to retreat from La Haye Sainte. Ammunition finished. The Frogs had brought up a horse battery and were pounding our line right and left at close range.

The captain was very gloomy. Said it was all up. Our centre must be wide open. But Maitland (he had been in front with us most of the day) swung the battalion round—I don't quite know how—and for the first time we had a bit of real fighting. It was grand. We charged in sections to retake La Haye Sainte, ready to reform square at a moment's notice, and we killed quite a lot of Frogs there, though that battery killed a lot of us. (No, I was quite all right.) I think I stuck my sword into someone. It had blood on it when Maitland retired us, very coolly, about fifty yards behind a sheltering bank, because cavalry was on us on our right flank.

While we were away on this little excursion, Major-General Adam's light brigade, three crack Line regiments, had filled the gap for us and driven off the cavalry. When we took up our new position they formed up at an angle to us. The captain said it was clever work on their part.

The Frogs' guns were firing all-out once again and we were lying down behind our bank for cover. Oh, I forgot to tell you: by this time Lord Saltoun had come back from Hougoumont. I heard him say, 'Hot work there,' and that was all. He's a very cool customer. His beard had got much worse during the day. Mine was pretty bad too—but patchy.

Then a *very* odd thing happened. We were all lying about, talking, and the men were reloading and so forth, when there was a commotion in Adam's brigade. A Frog officer, a carabineer, someone said, because he had a brass breastplate, was talking to Colonel Colborne of the 52nd and a man with a chimney sweep's face (it turned out he was Sir Augustus Fraser, C.-in-C. of the Horse Artillery but no one would have recognized

him except near to, perhaps.) The Frog was waving his hands about in the way they do. The captain who knows all that history stuff, said he was a Royalist come over to us, and how splendid that was and began a long disquisition on the Bourbons. Bacchus cut in on him with some joke about 'His pottle bellied Majesty, Louis the Eighteenth and Zoë'. (You would think Bacchus knew them personally.) That shut the captain up completely. It appears Louis XVIII is a bit peculiar with women. But we were all wondering about the Frog officer, when one of our Paddies (they've got the devil's own cheek) wandered over to the 52nd and came back with the message (you mustn't mind this, Mamma, but it's just what he *said*). 'He says, "That b-g-r Boney will be on us with his Guard in half an hour."'

We couldn't quite believe it, but an orderly had gone hell-for-leather to the Duke who was in the centre encouraging the troops holding off the Frogs near La Haye Sainte. The Duke rode along to us at once, with Colonel Hervey, his senior A.D.C. He talked to Maitland and Saltoun and rode away farther to our right. We were formed up two lines deep and moved to the crest of our ridge. The 2nd battalion formed up behind us. The four lines of us were about fifteen hundred men. (Mamma need not know they had started out about two thousand strong from Enghien on Friday.) Then we were ordered to lie down in that formation amongst the rye, once again. . . . Just where we had started the day. . . . It was about half past seven. . . . What use had we been? For me it was a very disappointing battle, Mamma. . . .

The campaign story closed for the moment. Perhaps there would be another and more interesting chapter. . . .

George the sergeant was lying beside Fred, just as he had been eight hours ago. He was chewing a long stalk of rye meditatively. Fred remarked it was devilish hot.

‘Sir. Certainly, sir, but not so bad as Spain. . . .’

‘You were all through the Peninsula campaign, George?’

‘Sir. No, sir. The Havercake Lads didn’t serve in Spain. I transferred to the Guards in the winter of ’12—couldn’t stand garrison duty in *Ireland*, sir. Think of it, sir. All them pigs and bogs and shebeens! *Ireland!* So I was out in time for Vittorier and then on. Quite a bit o’ fightin’, sir. Very ’ot weather at Vittorier, sir.’

They were silent. Then a messenger crept over from Halkett’s brigade. The recital in monotone was ‘Prussians—from—Ohang—joined—on—lcft—pass—it—on.’

‘Gad!’ said Fred enthusiastically and shut his mouth with a snap.

George was unmoved. ‘Sir? About time too, sir, if you arks me, sir.’

There were ‘Blimeys!’ and ‘Bedads!’ and ‘Ochs!’ and ‘Begorras!’ down the line, but no excitement.

‘Our battalion is very mixed, isn’t it?’ said Fred for the sake of saying something.

‘Sir. Perfick, sir. Jes’ right. About half Henglish, quarter Jocks and quarter Paddies. Perfick.’

‘You think so, George?’

‘Sir? Certain, sir. Henglish, good chaps at ’eart. Jocks cautious-like, Paddies—devil-may-care. *No* Taffies, if you please. The Jocks and the Paddies *think* they win the battles, but wot’s the ’arm if it please ’em? Perfick battalion, sir. You think it over, sir. You’ll agree with me, sir.’

Fred thought it over, and agreed without comment.

The sergeant was examining the head of his halberd.

‘That a good weapon?’

‘Sir. Middlin’, sir. But every man comes to the musket and the Brummagem eventually, sir.’

‘The Brummagem?’

‘Sir. Beg pardon, sir. The bayonet.’

Ah, thought Fred: made in Birmingham. And then, Good Heavens! I haven’t the slightest idea of how to load a musket! Supposing. . . . ?

The sergeant seemed to sense his alarm. ‘Sir. Won’t

come to that for *you*, sir. Jes' you stick to your sword, sir. You used it 'andy jes' now, if I may say so, sir.'

'Thank you, George.'

The Brigadier and Lord Saltoun, both mounted, rode along the line of the battalion. Jim and Dick raised, dipped, and again raised the Colours. At the end of the line a solitary drummer rolled a salute.

A voice said *sotto voce*, 'Cor', that'll frighten the Frogs no end.'

Maitland was unusually stern. 'I have it in command from His Grace to tell you his latest order. "We stand here and if necessary we die here to the last man." That is all.' He saluted the Colours, looked left and right along the line, and rode back to his post on the right. Lord Saltoun followed him.

No one commented on the order except a logical Scot who queried: 'But how do we *stand* and die when we're lying down?'

'Perhaps they'll get us up to die, chum,' said an Englishman, 'you never can tell with the officers. They do such peculiar things so'times.'

Fred thinking of that 'last man' inquired hesitatingly of the sergeant what Maitland meant. George thought he meant what he said, adding comfortingly that in twenty years' fighting he 'Had never known a battle in which *everyone* was killed. Not even in Spain, sir.'

Not much encouragement in that. . . .

The quiet tread of horsehoofs on soft ground in the rear and the murmur of voices reached them.

The sergeant, edging nearer, said in a hoarse whisper, 'Sir! Don't look round now, but the Dook's there.'

'Have you eyes in the back of your head, George?'

'Sir. Yes, sir.' A solemn affirmative.

The Duke! Business for the Guards then! Fred sneezed violently several times. The sergeant commiserated. It was hard luck in a battle. No time to blow your nose in a battle.

The French batteries roared steadily. Mingled with that

noise there was a thunderous roll of drums from their hidden line.

'The r-rum-dum, r-rum-dum, the rummadum, dummadum dum-dum,' murmured Fred and looked at his watch. It was a quarter to eight.

'Sir. Frogs' charge signal,' said George phlegmatically.

The sun, near to its setting, was striking through the trees on the right, blisteringly hot. Fred was sweltering in his tight uniform and the men lying too close, smelt horribly. I smell too, he thought disgustedly, so I oughtn't to mind . . . but oh, for a bath . . . and a shave . . . and . . . (he had another sneezing fit) . . . a dose of Mamma's cordial . . . and a long sleep. . . .

From the smoke-filled hollow, shouts of 'Vive l'Empereur!' came nearer, mixed with staccato commands and the tramp of heavy feet.

'What a noise the Frogs make,' said Fred.

'Sir. Lot o' excitable monkeys if you arks *me*, sir.'

Fred had another bout of sneezing. How maddening this was!

They could see nothing. The French batteries were silent, but those steadily marching feet were approaching . . . shaking the ground. . . .

Suddenly the English line of batteries opened up. What a din!

'Sir. Double-shotted, sir,' said George. 'Lot of nice noise. That's the stuff, sir.'

'Much more effective double-shotted?'

'Sir. Much more. Kill a 'alf-dozen instead of a couple. Splendid, double-shotted guns, are, sir.'

Fred had a sudden panic. Those tramping feet would be upon them, over them, a bayonet in his guts before he knew. . . .

'Now, Maitland, now's your time.' The Duke's voice, clear and crisp and close behind them.

The steel spring of discipline worked with miracle smoothness. The four ranks, three hundred and fifty or so

in a rank, were on their feet, aligned, shoulder to shoulder, at the same instant.

Before them, fifty paces away, a solid phalanx of men in dark blue with tall bearskin caps, muskets at the port, seemed to tower above them.

The Imperial Guard!

Mounted officers splendid in gold braid, rode ahead of the ranks.

'By Jove! Boney's Grenadiers!' said Bacchus nonchalantly. Saltoun's voice: 'Ready!'

The sergeant, excited for the first time. 'Sir! Look at *him*, sir. The one on foot. Carrots. That's Ney, the great Ney. I see'd *him* before, sir. In Spain. . . .'

Thirty paces. . . .

Saltoun: 'Z-zent!'

Then: 'Arm!'

An interminable pause. Oh God, thought Fred: he's forgotten the last command. . . .

Twenty paces. . . .

'FIRE!'

The roar of good old Brown Bess (a hundred years ago, Marlborough's wars, thought Fred for half a split second) and the French front rank, seventy men, wavered, a hundred men, two or perhaps even three hundred fell. A general rolled dead from his horse.

Ney, waving the hilt of his broken sword, stormed at his troops to advance. Instead, they stopped, seemed almost to recoil.

The English Guards were firing steadily. Front rank firing, second rank loading. Fred watched that process, feverish with anxiety. Everyone comes to the musket? . . . Cartridges bitten, pans primed, powder and ball down the barrel, ramrods drawn, used, replaced. The musket is ready for action once more.

He had heard that many men in their excitement would forget to remove the ramrod, and, shooting it away, remain helpless and useless. But none forgot in the firing line of His Britannic Majesty's 1st Foot Guards.

The French recovered from the first discharge, returned the fire with desperate ferocity and haste.

Gaps in the English line closed automatically.

But at the French command: 'Serrez les rangs!' the soldiers, bewildered, disobeyed, attempting to deploy.

Saltoun's brisk matter-of-fact voice shouted, 'Now's the time, my boys!'

Bayonets flashed, fixed, aligned, and the English charged.

The French Guards gave way, the English Guards pursued. Fred, his sword miraculously in his hand—when did he draw it?—ran beside his own line, ran with them through the billowing smoke and saw the hecatomb of the battle-field. Appalled, his mind closed. That sight would be no part of his campaign story to his mother.

A French Guardsman came at him with the bayonet, a tall sombre figure looming above him. Fred parried the thrust, cut wildly at the grim face. The Frenchman fell, rolled over. His bearskin rolled away. A short man, shorter than I, thought Fred, and then: I've been frightened of a hat! A hat! He need never fear an Imperial Guardsman again.

There were ten minutes of confused and desperate hand-to-hand fighting in the hollow. Then three other squares of the Imperial Guard advancing, menacing the English left flank, an order was given and misunderstood.

'Form square?'

'Retire?'

No one could decide. In fact, they retired in a muddled rush and Fred, watching Colonel d'Oyly stagger wounded into a private's arms, nearly fell over Pardoe's body already stripped to its shirt.

'Good God! The swine!' He didn't know he had spoken aloud. Ahead, George had Pardoe's coat over his arm.

Fred caught up with him, seized him by the sleeve, roared in his best parade-ground voice, 'Sergeant, what's the meaning of *this*?'

'His mother'll want it, poor lady. Always did it in Spain. . . .'

Another *bêtise!* Would he *never* learn? And amidst the tumult, Fred shouted to the Heavens, '*Damn Spain!*'

They were back at their starting position—that beastly bit of ground—but formed up more or less at right angles to it, across the Ohain cart track.

Many things had happened in the last ten minutes.

Halkett's brigade, remnants of the 69th, of George's Havercake Lads, of the Three Tens and of the 73rd had thrown their left shoulder forward to protect the Guards' left flank.

Of the regiments of Adam's brigade, Colborne's forethought had brought his 52nd right shoulders forward, forming a narrow angle (Fred later learnt to call it a re-entrant angle—very stylish that!) as the Guards realigned themselves in their new position. Across the apex of the angle, standing parallel with the Ohain track, was the 2nd battalion of the 95th, a line of dark green linking the two scarlet-coated regiments.

On the right of the 52nd towards Hougoumont, the 71st in their tartan trews and red coats, the third regiment under Adam's command, waited in double line.

'Gad!' said a languid voice. 'Look at Colborne! Devilish clever! Take 'em in flanking fire with us firing front as they come up!'

Behind the English Guards were cavalry, newcomers, fresh and ready, Vivian's Hussars, the 10th, the 18th and the 1st German, eleven squadrons, thirteen hundred men.

Behind Adam's brigade, were Vandeleur's three regiments of Light Dragoons, the 10th, the 12th and the 16th, nine squadrons, eleven hundred Englishmen, equal in readiness and vigour with their comrades of Vivian's. Stationed all day on the extreme left, both brigades had been denied a part in the fighting and were raring to go.

Behind again were fresh infantry battalions in square. For one awful moment Fred thought they were Frogs, by their blue coats, but saw their English shakos. They must be Belgians brought in from God knew where.

The 52nd were firing steadily into the flank of the three battalions of the Imperial Guard, tramping resolutely toward the English line. The English Guards, realigned and reloaded, added their fire. On both sides, the guns were silent, fearing to kill their friends.

Fred thought: these Frogs look different—more determined—steadier—older—with pigtails (how old-fashioned!) and heavy moustaches. . . .

‘Sir,’ said a captain to Saltoun. ‘Very little ammunition left. None in the knapsacks, sir.’

‘Keep at it while you can. Every bullet counts—from the Guards.’

They kept at it.

Adam’s brigade, light-footed, lightly accoutred men, confident and alone, advanced in the sight of the whole Allied line.

In the lead, the 52nd, the Pompadours, on the heels of their beloved ‘Fire-eater’ Colborne (oddly dressed in the cape of a boat-cloak over his uniform), ploughed, four ranks deep, diagonally, through the carnage of the battlefield.

On their left, the sparse ranks of the 95th, the Sweeps, Captain Logan leading, drove the last of Donzelot’s division from the blazing ruins of La Haye Sainte.

On the Pompadours’ right, the 71st, their massed pipers playing ‘Johnny Cope’, joined in the charge and the Scots in the ranks of the 1st Foot Guards, yelled in encouragement, ‘Hey! The Glascae Keelies!’

Saltoun himself in reminder, shouted after them, ‘Let the 71st go forward!’

And Maitland, approving, ‘Ha! You remember *that*? The Duke in Spain?’

Fred, leaning on his sword, furious that the Line should lead the attack, just because the Guards had no ammunition (they still had a foot and half of bayonet, hadn’t they?), heard a mocking voice behind him.

‘Quite the old campaigner!’

He swung round, ready to thunder a retort, but instead sneezed several times.

Guardsman Gronow, shako in hand, was thoughtfully examining its top.

'Some careless fellow has put a ball through this,' he said calmly and, producing a belcher handkerchief, stuffed it into the crown. 'I mustn't get a draught to my head or I'll have a dreadful cold like yours, my poor dear friend.'

'Mr. Rees Howell Gronow.' Fred had stopped sneezing, blown his nose violently. 'Will you sup with me one evening on—on—a dish of *boiled leeks*?'

'With pleasure, my dear boy, with pleasure.' (That maddening assumed Welsh accent.) 'It was a favourite dish of my ancestor, King Henry VII, of blessed and glorious memory. Where shall we meet for this elegant supper?'

Fred, taking a shot in the dark, replied promptly, 'Café des Anglais, Boulevard des Italiens.' (A friend who knew Paris had mentioned such a restaurant.)

'Alas, my dear boy, but I must be in London almost at once. I am not on leave. I have guard duty at St. James's on Wednesday. Let us say the Guards' Club instead.'

'I don't belong.' Fred tried not to mind.

'What a pity! You get low whist and billiards there in very agreeable company. Let us say Stephen's Hotel in Bond Street. You know of Stephen's, no doubt? I will give instructions for the cooking of the leeks and you shall reserve the table and the stable accommodation. Remember, one is often unable to get a stall for one's horse at Stephen's during the Season, unless one reserves in advance.'

Gronow put on his shako, adjusted the chin strap. 'That is better. I shall not catch cold. You dear boy, must take care of yourself. Children should not be allowed out on damp grass at night. My dear mother has always said so.'

Fred turned his back on the tormentor, swearing under his breath. Gronow, laughing, recited:

'With hat of Wellington stuck fore and aft,
And crimson sash, tied carelessly abaft.'

Fred thought despairingly: I'll never worst him—but anyway, anyway, we're *all* wearing shakos. . . .

Someone passing asked, 'Seen the Babe anywhere?'

'No—don't say? Not——?'

'Can't find him. . . .' And passed on. . . .

Later, two privates, themselves wounded, carried in the Babe, blanched to the lips, but smiling, 'I'm all right—but for this—mess.'

Blood pouring from a thigh, had ruined his well-cut blue-grey trousers.

'Sir. Couldn't get him back before, sir,' said one private, saluting Saltoun, as they laid the Babe on the ground. 'Sorry, sir.'

'Get Mr. Gilder to see to you both, my boys,' said Saltoun. They limped away and Mr. Curtis, called to the Babe, snipped, tore, stripped off the right trouser leg, swabbed, padded, bandaged expertly.

Near to fainting, the Babe pleaded. 'Don't send me away, *please*, Mr. Curtis. I want to see—everything.'

They spread a boat-cloak, laid him on it, let him be. Mr. Curtis said it would do no harm. Only a deep flesh wound in a healthy young animal. He would be all right.

The Babe lay very quiet, with George pretending not to be hovering over him, saying occasionally in his gruffest voice, 'Sir. They shan't take you away, sir. Don't you worry. . . .'

Dick Master, the King's Colour draped negligently over his shoulder, came up with the news that their encounter had not been with the Grenadiers of the Old Guard after all.

'Not the Grenadiers of the Old Guard?' a chorus from the Ensigns.

'No—only some of the Chasseurs—the fellows called the Middle Guard.'

'*What a swindle!* Who told you?'

'That knowledgeable chap, the captain. Says the Grena-

diers always wear moustaches and those fellows had side-whiskers . . .'

'That's true,' said someone mournfully.

'But the *second* lot had moustaches,' Fred put in.

'The Pompadours got most of them though,' said another.

'And the Grenadiers have all red epaulettes and fringes and those chaps had *green* epaulettes with red fringes.'

'Damn that captain! Is he *sure*?'

'He *says* so. Quite sure. In Spain . . .'

'Don't mention that blasted Hell of a Spain to me, Dick.'

Master grinned, flapped a restraining hand at Fred, walked on to retail the news, the Colour trailing.

Fred stood still and silent, utterly miserable.

Not the Grenadiers! *And* the Line leading the advance! Had Fate any *more* disappointments in reserve for Ensign Swann?

The Babe, sitting up, suddenly, croaking faintly, roused Fred. 'Here come Vivian's Hussars!'

The leading squadrons, the 18th, in blue with white braided dolmans, furred pelisses, busbies with red pouches and foot high plumes of white and red, sabres drawn, sabretaches swinging and clattering, swept behind the Guards, swinging leftwards towards the battle-field, through Bolton's battery farther to the right. The 10th followed.

'The Droggeders!' roared the Guards and the gunners, and 'The Droggeders! The China Tenth!' yelled Vandeleur's Dragoons, a gallant encouragement from rivals eager to beat them in the attack.

The Babe squeaked faintly, 'They ride as straight as if they were riding to hounds.'

Bacchus, sprawled near him, trying to ease his aching shoulder, agreed. 'The Light always do,' he said. Now I remember in Spain . . . But the Babe had fainted and Mr. Curtis had him carried to an ambulance cart.

Are we to stand here, waiting *for ever*, thought Fred, and waiting, made several (and somewhat incompatible) vows:

he would transfer into the Line; he would take service with the Grand Turk; he would (quite definitely) shoot Gronow and then, perhaps—well, yes, perhaps—himself.

Unfortunately he possessed no pistol. It would be bad form to borrow one . . . besides he might miss. . . . No, one need *never* miss, one put the barrel into one's mouth and blew the top of one's head off. One thus avoided the disgrace of a hand that trembled too violently. To miss would be a *bêtise* of the worst order. . . .

He pulled out his watch, peered at it. A glimmer of moonlight, piercing the night clouds, lit up the hands showing nearly a quarter to nine. . . .

PART 9

Even the high gods forsake us

‘Day past understanding . . . unique defeat in which, in spite of the most fearful catastrophe, the glory of the vanquished has suffered not one whit. . . .’

Napoleon to Las Cases, in exile at St. Helena, June 1816.

COIGNET waited, glowering, his hand on the carriage door handle. Bassano, moving forward, had his foot on the step, Fain was reluctantly following him. The Portfolio stood on the threshold, Fleury in the shadow of the passage. . . .

An orderly, riding up, full tilt, flung himself from his horse. He was bareheaded, his face smoke-blackened, his uniform torn.

‘Pour l’amour de Dieu! These gentlemen still here! A traitor officer—carabineer—cuirassier—we don’t know—rode into the English lines an hour ago—told—God knows what. . . .’

Bassano exclaimed, ‘Heaven help us!’

And Fain, ‘Those *damned* Royalists! They’re everywhere!’

And Fleury, ‘Heaven won’t help us *now*.’

And Bassano to the orderly, ‘And so?’

‘The English had warning—fresh troops—Belgians—from the right—in support—cavalry, fresh, from the left—the English Foot Guards—lying hidden in the rye—Wellington there himself—giving orders—the English up—line solid—firing—twenty paces’ range—as one man. The attack of the Guard has failed—they—they—the *Guard*—recoiled. The news is all along our line—“The Guard recoils!”’ His voice broke.

Bassano murmured, ‘Just what Reille predicted at breakfast this morning. “This may well be a real Spanish battle. The English will only show themselves at the exactly right moment.”’

Coignet demanded: ‘*Which* of the Guard?’

‘The 3rd and 4th regiments. Five battalions.’

'Pah!' Coignet spat out the word. 'There are still the Old Moustaches! You young gentlemen get into panics over nothing at all.'

And Fleury: 'But where's the Emperor?'

'Leading in three battalions—of the Old Guard.'

Coignet interrupted, laughing contemptuously. 'Ah, what *are* you all worrying about? The Old Guard has not yet been in action—and you think the battle lost! It's only just *beginning!*'

'But,' Bassano queried, '*three* battalions against the whole English army?'

'Three battalions against the *whole world!*' Coignet shouted, shaking his fist in Bassano's face. Then, more calmly, 'Now, gentlemen, to your carriages *at once*. You will get the good news in Paris. It will be there *before* you are.'

They obeyed. The steps were put up, the door of the first carriage clacked sharply, and proceeding at a foot's pace, the coachman guided it slowly into the host of fugitives.

'And now, you young gentlemen,' said Coignet fiercely, holding the door of the second carriage. The Portfolio mounted.

'I am not going yet.' Fleury was equally fierce. 'I'll wait for General Fouler. I suppose you can give me a seat, General?'

Fouler agreed grudgingly. He had three junior equerries and young Gudin; six would be rather a crush on a long journey.

'I'll sit on the floor—or your *knees*,' Fleury raged.

Coigent said, 'B-g-r all civilians,' and strode off.

The Portfolio drove away alone.

Fleury went to find Marie. He told her, falsely cheerful, that there had been a slight check to the leading battalions of the Guard, but more were advancing to support them and all would come right in the end.

She had seen the other gentlemen leave and asked why he had stayed.

'I didn't want to leave—you. And the Emperor will

certainly need a secretary when he arrives here later on.'

'That Captain Coignet *told* you to go. Those soldiers in the orchard will take care of me, I expect.' She sighed. 'And I—don't matter. When *He* comes he will be angry with me for letting his dinner spoil.'

'Ah, don't worry about *that*, poor little girl.'

He made her come to sit on the stairs with him. Silent, they let the great roar of confused noise flow over them, each engaged with their own thoughts.

At length, Fleury forced back to reality, by the rising note of panic in the pandemonium, distinguished alarming words.

'The Prussians . . . !'

'The Prussians . . . ! ?'

'The Prussians are here . . . !'

' . . . are here !'

He went to the front door, saw a nightmare passing, made more fantastic, more horrible by the darkness lit occasionally by shafts of pale moonlight.

Crazed men jostled, stumbled, fell, lay, rose, fought one another in their flight. Cavalrymen on maddened horses spurred wildly, trampling their countrymen down, pitiless in their resolve to escape. Gun-carriages, the horses struggling, straining, rearing, slipping, lashed by their drivers, finally overturned and the drivers, cutting the traces, galloped off, leaving the guns and carriages upended in the road, further grotesque obstacles, blocking the way to safety, that possession beyond price.

Fleury watched, motionless. His thoughts were formless in their horror, pity and despair. . . .

Then, terror piled on terror, the dreadful and ever-dreaded cry, 'Nous sommes trahis!'

And ultimate awful screaming, 'Sauve qui peut!'

Aghast, Fleury ran to the back door. The Chasseur battalion was deployed over the fields towards Chantelet wood. Gunfire resounded very near.

In the yard, Coignet held open the door of Fouler's carriage. He was pale in spite of twenty years' weather tan.

'Now will you go, monsieur? Your last chance. The General has waited for you. You can go or—'

Fleury said, very low, 'That girl?'

'*Damn* the girl!' Coignet shouted. 'Get in and get *on*!'

Marie was standing at the door, watching. Fleury ran to her, but she pushed him firmly from her. 'Go! Go! You can't help me by staying.' She was calm. 'Perhaps—I shall see *Him* again.'

He looked at her in amazement, awe and pity. The High Gods forsaking mighty Rome! The End of the World! And—all she could think of—to see *Him*—perhaps, once again.

He kissed her forehead, ran to the carriage, threw himself in. In a moment, the horses, rearing under the lash, sprang forward and with a lurch through the yard gate the carriage was gone into the darkness of the night. Captain Coignet, mounted, followed it. His great voice, bellowing amidst the din cleared a passage for him as he rode close behind the carriage. . . .

At last she was alone. She could carry out her plan unobserved. She took a lighted candle and, passing the clock, held it up to the face, saw it was nearly nine o'clock. Then she set the candle on the floor just inside the wide-open front door. All else was in darkness. The sentries had gone, the torches burnt out, the tricolour moved gently in the night air.

Her body was wearier than she had ever known it, and her mind overburdened by a night and day of newly awakened emotions refused to encompass reality. The frenzied mob was a phantom parade. She had ceased to fear—even for His safety. He *must* be safe, because He and She were going to have a happy life together—stretching limitless—into the rosy future. . . .

She went to sit again on the stairs and happy dreams filled her thoughts. Bonaparte would come—as surely as tomorrow's sunrise—and they would go away together, far

away—into exile if need be. What did that matter? They had exiled Him before—but this time—he would have her to wait on Him—help Him—comfort Him—and—her mind hardly dared to touch the last most intimate service . . . but . . . it was quite simple and entirely wonderful. To go into exile with Bonaparte and live happily ever after. When He need not be an Emperor, He would have time for Marie Houzeau. Sunshine . . . flowers . . . day-long happiness . . . night joys.

A faint, defiant, drum-roll recalled her from her day-dreams sufficiently to give a passing thought to M. Fleury and hope that he had got safely away. He didn't really matter, of course. She had tired of M. Fleury long ago.

'A silk dress, a silk shift, satin shoes with diamond buckles, the diamonds set specially for her by Monsieur'—someone. All she could want of material possessions. *He* had promised them to her.

The candle flickered in the doorway. Moonlight touched dark silhouettes passing, disciplined ranks, tall bearskins. She heard the steady tramp of soldiers' feet. She recognized the 'men of iron', the 'great, the final reserve', the men who would give the coup de grâce, the Grenadiers of the Old Guard.

They passed.

Behind them the road was empty and silent. The silence deepened, as though a great curtain had dropped, surrounding the farm. The sounds of battle were only a low and level ground bass.

She crept to the threshold, gazed towards the battle-field.

At the turn of the road, a group of horsemen appeared, riding with weary slowness. As they drew nearer, the moonlight lighting up their faces, she began to recognize some of the Great Ones: Soult, Bertrand, Flahaut, Ney, bareheaded, swaying in the saddle, Prince Jérôme, La Bédoyère. . . .

Her mind quivered with hope . . . and piercing anxiety. She retreated to the shadow of the stairs, crept, trembling to the top stair, sat, deathly cold. . . .

The horsehoofs drew nearer. The Great Ones paused, grouped about the open door.

The stern-faced Drouot, very erect in the saddle, joined them. Then, after an eternity of waiting . . . the Emperor. . . .

At a word of command, with a simultaneous stamp of feet, and the ring of muskets brought to order, unseen ranks of soldiers halted.

. . . The candle had gone out. . . .

The Emperor, dismounting, said something to La Bedoyère, then raised his head to look at the flag. She saw his dead-white face, his tear-stained cheeks, his eyes pools of blackness under the hard line of the hat. . . . She gripped her knees, determined not to faint . . . not now . . . when He had come. . . .

La Bedoyère tramped through the house and came back, bringing Major Duuring. A smart salute and the Emperor spoke. A step backwards by Duuring, saluting again; the Emperor's voice raised: 'I count on you.'

A soldier had brought a horse from the stables, led Mar-engo away. Still the Emperor hesitated.

Then Drouot's voice, harsh: 'Pour l'amour de Dieu, sire, ride on. The enemy are already happy enough.'

Once more the Emperor looked up, saluted the flag, mounted and, shaking the reins, passed slowly out of sight. . . .

The rearward troops, brought to attention, proceeded at a firm, steady pace behind him. Their bearskin caps passed in perfect alignment.

Major Duuring's Chasseurs, drawn up at the yard gate, fell in and with the precision of a parade manœuvre on the Place du Carrousel, wheeled into position as ultimate guard. Sombre, unyielding, unafraid, they barred the road to their frantic countrymen and to Wellington's advancing army. . . .

The Pompadours, pushing forward, were caught un-

expectedly in the carbine fire of the 23rd Dragoons, pursuing scattered bands of French cavalry, then came upon a square of the Imperial Guard, solid as a rock in a raging sea.

Pausing, uncertain, they heard above the clamour, Wellington himself shout: 'They'll not stand! Go on, Colborne, go on!'

An A.D.C. implored, 'Come *back*, Your Grace.'

And again, Wellington: 'I will, when I've seen these fellows off.'

Driving that French square slowly before them, the Pompadours crossed the pike, swarmed up the slope east of La Belle Alliance and, leaping over dead bodies, discarded gear and shattered guns, wheeled southward and continued the relentless pursuit. Before them the square, steadily diminishing in numbers, but still keeping formation, retreated not two hundred and fifty paces ahead. . . .

The sparse ranks of the 95th, La Haye Sainte cleared, joined in the chase. . . .

The 71st, their pipers still playing 'Johnny Cope' scrambled up to the line of the great battery. Careful men of Glasgow, they stopped to chalk their regimental number on their booty of French guns. Some of Captain Reid's company swung a gun southward and, with a cheerful lack of discrimination, poured shot into Lobau's retreating corps, the Young Guard and Prussian Bulow's triumphant infantry, all debouching from the Planchenoit road.

Vivian's Hussars deployed and, roaring 'No quarter! No quarter!' scattered the remaining squadrons of Imperial cavalry, silenced the guns in their path, and reached the turnpike road south of La Belle Alliance.

Charging in column of squadrons, cheered by infantry shouts of 'There go the Cherry-Pickers! The Supple Twelfth! The Scarlets!' Vandeleur's Dragoons hurled themselves upon the square placed by the Emperor himself at half past

seven, a solitary outpost near Hougoumont. Those Guards, with Roguet in command, superb in discipline and defiance, awaited the onslaught. Vandeleur's squadrons rode up to them, rode into them and rode them down. Spurring onward, they drew level with Vivian's, already on the pike, and, riding parallel to them on their right over the fields, they charged their fleeing enemies. Their route was plain: to Genappe, to Charleroi, to Paris and, if need be, to Hell. . . .

On a slight rise behind Maitland's Guards, Wellington, standing in his stirrups, waved his hat three times. With colours flying, to the ruffle of drums, to the skirl of pipes, bugles and trumpets braying out the Charge, the Allied army, compelled for ten hours to stand and defend, swept forward to the attack, cheering in four languages. . . .

Fred went forward with his battalion. Beside him the knowledgeable captain was panting out details of Fontenoy. Fred's sword swung in a wide arc.

'Mind my nose!' said the captain, petulantly.

Fred turned on him, furious, and with supreme assurance roared, *'Fontenoy? You mean Dettingen!'*

'Do I—are you sure? Dettingen?'

Exasperated, Fred raced ahead, caught up with George with his seven-foot halberd over his shoulder.

'Well, George, what do you think?'

'Sir? Wot do I think? Nothin' like this in Spain, sir. Nothin' at all like this, if you're arskin' me, sir. This beats Spain 'ollow, sir.'

Not such a bad battle after all.

Awaiting the vengeance of their conquerors, amidst the turmoil of their terrified countrymen, six squares of the Imperial Guard, all that remained of the nine battalions that had marched against the Allied line, all that remained of an army with twenty years of glory behind it, waited, ready to die . . . to cover their Emperor's retreat. . . .

Mompez' 2nd Chasseurs, falling back slowly in good order, reached La Belle Alliance, where, reduced to a handful of men, the rout overwhelmed them.

Guillemin's 3rd Grenadiers, flung back upon the slope, died before they gained the turnpike road.

Cambronne's 1st Chasseurs, survivors reforming after the charge of Vivian's 10th Hussars, received the attack of Colonel William Halkett's Osnabrück Militia. Cambronne himself, on foot, called upon four times to surrender, hurled his defiant 'Merde!' as he fell unconscious beneath Halkett's sword cut. The square went down around him, fighting to the last.

Harlet's 4th Grenadiers, with eighteen officers down and Harlet desperately wounded, borne backwards by the press, carried their colonel with them in their steady retreat to final dissolution upon the pike.

Roguet, 'le Vieux de la Vieille' with the Grenadiers who had survived Vandeleur's cavalry thrust, joined by the men of the 4th Chasseurs yet alive after their charge on the English Foot Guards, stood firm. Reduced from square to triangle, to cluster of brave and desperate men, guarding their Commander and their Eagle, ramparted round by their own dead, ammunition exhausted, they fired a final volley, gave a final 'Vive l'Empercur!' and, bayonets fixed, fought their way to the road and backwards to Rossomme. . . .

Petit's two battalions of the 1st Grenadiers, ultimate reserve at Rossomme, proudest of the Old Moustaches, had formed up before and behind their Emperor and guarded him riding southward. Only at Quatre Bras did they accord him their final salute and disperse to find safety for themselves, at his express command. . . .

Bulow's infantry arrived at a slow pace at La Belle Alliance, shakos flourished on muskets, singing Luther's hymn in honoured memory of fifty years' tradition; of Rossbach, of Leuthen and of their 'Old Fritz'.

Prussian bands played rousing march tunes and 'God

Save the King'. Wellington and Blücher met, embraced, conferred. His Grace knowing no German, the old Prussian exclaimed in his scanty French, 'Quelle affaire!' (What a business!)

English bugles blew the rallying call. Adam's brigade piled arms around Rossomme and prepared to bivouac on the left of the road.

The cavalry, returning, reluctant to leave the pursuit to the Prussians, settled down for the night in the Bois du Caillou.

Vandeleur's had captured waggons of food and brandy. Every troop had its share.

Sir Hussey Vivian, touring his Hussars to commend them, found Major Taylor, commander of the 10th, sitting down to freshly boiled chicken and bacon. At eleven o'clock a thoughtful batman had put on a pot to simmer at Papelotte farm for his master's dinner. Major Taylor had had no time for dinner and was relishing his supper the more. . . .

Lieutenant William Cartwright, his baggage lost, was wishing he had a clean shirt. He would write home for money and then he could buy poor Gunning's kit. He must have a clean shirt to ride down the Champs-Elysées. . . .

Maitland, deathly tired, but cheerful as a sandboy, saw his battalions to bed on the ground to the right of the road at Rossomme opposite the bivouac of the 52nd.

Fred had discarded all his campaign stories and was composing a short letter to his Mother, in his head.

My dearest Mamma, I am safe and well. We have given the Frogs a good licking. Our battalion spent most of the day kicking its heels. It is very hot here. I have one of my nasty head colds, but there's a captain who is rather a bore because he will talk history, but he has a good remedy in his baggage which should be up any time now and he has offered me a dose. I am very sleepy. My love to the girls and my respects to Father. Your ever loving son, F. D. Swann. PS. The

most astonishing sight on the battle-field was a dead tortoiseshell kitten. An Ensign named Leeke of the 52nd has just been across from their bivouac to tell me about it. Isn't it odd? . . .

Wellington, accompanied by his Sardinian A.D.C., Major Comte de Sales, rode back towards the deserted ridge and his headquarters in the village of Waterloo.

The shouts of 'Old Nosey!' and 'Ar' Arty!' brought the usual polite salute, two fingers to the hat. . . .

In a small dirty room at La Belle Alliance, Blücher gave a single order to his commanders: 'Follow the enemy while there is a man or horse able to stand.'

The commanders saluted and dispersed: Bülow and Zieten to pursue towards the French frontier, Pirch to Maransart to cut across Grouchy's line of retreat.

Already the Uhlans, fresh men, savage-hearted, with Gneisnau, Blücher's iron Chief-of-Staff at their head, had flung themselves upon the hated, helpless enemy. Sabring, cursing, yelling, 'Kein Pardon! Kein Pardon!' in their unremitting fury, they mowed the Frenchmen down.

Far ahead, mounted on a horse taken from the Emperor's abandoned carriage, rode their solitary demon drummer. At Quatre Bras, five miles away, he was still pounding out the Charge. . . .

There, the Emperor, numbed with weariness and grief, had paused in a meadow, encircled by his staff. He was heard to murmur, 'The same—ever since Crécy.' Then the drum-roll roused him and he rode on towards the frontier. Beside him, riding knee to knee, Flahaut supported him in the saddle throughout the night. . . .

An honour cherished life-long. . . .

. . . In the deserted farmhouse, Marie had fainted. . . .

From a long way off, she struggled back to consciousness. A post-chaise stood at the door. Her heart leaped into her

throat . . . but sank again, for only Fleury got down, came, groping in the darkness, calling urgently, 'Marie! Marie!' and stumbled up the stairs to her, guided by the pale blur of her face.

He clutched her, shook her. 'The Emperor? Where is the Emperor?'

'I—how can I know? He went past—long ago—I don't know—officers—those generals.'

'When? *When?*'

'I don't know—hours ago, perhaps. He stopped—a few minutes—I had put a little candle in the doorway.'

'Did he see it? What *happened?* Pour l'amour de Dieu, girl, tell me. He's lost, perhaps *dead*, I must find him—I've asked along the road—no one knows or cares. . . .' His voice broke.

'Major Duuring came to speak to him. He said, "I count on you," and rode on—they all rode on—a long time ago.'

'He rode on—where?'

'I suppose towards Genappe—they went southwards—there were those Guards rows and rows in front—behind—they blocked the road—and the fields—the frightened men couldn't get past—then I must have fainted. . . .'

'He rode on? Without coming in?'

'Yes—rode on. He looked up at the flag—he was crying—rode on.'

Fleury let go her arm, and with flaming anger, exclaimed: 'Pour l'amour de Dieu! The supreme egotist!'

She did not understand the word, said, 'You came back—towards the battle—to look for Him?'

'Yes.'

'But why, monsieur?'

'Because like you—fool that I am—I love him. . . . Without Him it would be the end of the world indeed—I *have* to find Him. Bassano and Fain are walking—their carriage is stuck—a howitzer overturned—Marchand—I don't know. But I *have* to find Him.' He paused, then still unbelieving, repeated his question. 'He passed by—and didn't come in?'

She said, in a faraway voice, 'Who was—Josephine?
'
'Josephine? Why?'

'Because he said that my hair—my eyes and—other things reminded him of Josephine.'

Once more he cried out, but this time, as though in pain, 'Pour l'amour de Dieu!'

'But who *was* she?'

'His first love, his first wife—not worthy to kiss your feet.'

'Oh why, why—how can you say that—of his *wife*?'

'It's true—true. He adored her and she shrugged away his love. He laid his young high-hearted dreams at her feet and she played with her pet dog and said, "Comme tu es drôle, Bonaparte." He brought her his first laurels of victory—and she preferred the diamonds of other men. If *she* hadn't—deflowered him—when he was young and ardent and all noble-natured he would have been a different man. He would have been God and he is only a demi-god—broken. She tainted the pure spring—so fresh—so young. She broke his heart—years ago, before you were born. But you . . . you—' They were sobbing bitterly in each other's arms, her head on his breast, his tears on her hair.

'I don't understand—I don't understand,' she cried wildly, and a third time, in deeper anguish, 'I don't *understand*!'

'Don't try, chérie, ma chérie, it's beyond you or anyone's understanding. It lies on the knees of the gods. Fate—the star—and Josephine.'

His postilion called urgently for him to come. Soldiers were cursing him, threatening him and his master who, with a carriage facing towards the enemy advance, must be a traitor Rovalist.

Suddenly calm and dignified, she bade him go. She *wished* to be alone.

He kissed her hair gently, then her eyes. She denied him her lips. 'I hear and obey—Empress.' There was nothing theatrical in the epithet, only sober and respectful salutation. 'I had hoped . . .'

'No,' she said firmly, 'No—no—no. . . .'

Exhausted, she stumbled to her bed, huddled there and at long last, slept. . . .

All through the night the Prussians roared past. Time and again they tore through the parlours and kitchen, pillaging, desecrating the hated enemy's headquarters.

English officers, sightseeing in the early morning light, stole Marengo from her stall at the farm.

At six o'clock, final horror, the Prussians fired the barn, leaving the wounded to die in the flames.

During the morning, the Boucquéau family returned, gazed at the ruins of their home, only two days ago so pleasant and prosperous. Timidly they entered by the front door swinging on one hinge. They found to their surprise and guilty relief their maidservant, unharmed, but sunk in a death-like sleep.

The family reacted typically. Old Madame, forgetting for a moment the loss of her cherished possessions, said gently, 'Poor child, let her sleep on.' Young Madame had one of her 'attacks' and was propelled downstairs by her husband. The 'attack' grew worse at sight of the parlours. Sylvie, going hopefully in search of kind friends with sweetmeats, found only a charred and greasy lump of mutton and suddenly began to scream.

Old Monsieur and Géry, wandering from room to room, noting and commenting sadly in undertones, found a braided and feathered bicorne in the best parlour. Inside was the name 'Poupart, Hatmaker to H.I.M. the Emperor Napoléon'.

Géry said with contempt, 'Some officer's rubbish, the Emperor never wears a feathered hat,' and threw it scornfully aside. Prince Jérôme never called to claim it.

They then trudged doggedly in silence about the yard, the stables, the fields beyond the gate. Last of all, shuddering, they entered the still smouldering barn.

Old Monsieur broke silence for the first time. 'Devils!' he said savagely. 'Devils! This was done in full daylight, hardly three hours ago.'

Géry nodded silently.

The survey completed, old Monsieur said purposefully, 'I shall go and prepare a protest and a list of damage and a demand for compensation at once. When I have done, we will take it to the Mayor. Meanwhile——' he gestured towards the barn. Géry nodded, went to fetch a spade.

Monsieur went into the every-day parlour, shut the door, slowly gathered paper, pen, ink, and began to write in a laborious hand:

Boucquéau, Henri. Commune of Vieux Genappe. Details of goods carried off or destroyed by pillage. . . . Barn burnt; one horse; twelve cows; five pigs; agricultural instruments; sawn firewood; hay, straw for bedding, sixty bundles; wheat, oats, rye in sheaves; one hundred and fifty chickens; Coin: three thousand five hundred francs: silverware of all sorts; men's and women's shifts and shirts; other clothes, household linen; bedding; cloths; napkins; pewter; crockery; kitchen utensils; four bottles of wine; thirty casks of beer; two of vinegar; chests of drawers; wardrobes; chairs; table; salted meat; butter; oil (and at last), etc.

Total capacity of the cultivated land. As proprietor, seventy acres . . . as tenant, thirty acres. Foodstuffs ruined, Wheat, Rye, Clover, Hay, Beans, Barley, Potatoes, Meadows . . .

For a while, Monsieur sat motionless, staring at the terrible list. It spelt ruin.

At length, sighing, he folded the paper, put it in his pocket and called Géry. They put on their best hats (found on their usual pegs in the hall cupboard) and, carefully disregarding the signs of a battle so lately fought upon their own doorstep, set off to see the Mayor.

Boucquéau's sole comment to his son was that this was worse than '94.

They found M. Vandevelde had just compiled his own alarming list. He had had M. Charlier and M. Dechamp in. No doubt the rest of the Commune would be along soon.

He signed the certificate of loss, advised M. Boucquéau to procure a valuation as quickly as possible. The Government would, inevitably, be very slow in paying compensation.

Leaving, the Boucquéaus exchanged mournful greetings with those of their neighbours, awaiting their turn. Louis Delpierre, Jean Semal and François Lepage were already there. Jean Cornel was hurrying up the road as they walked homeward.

The whole Commune was ruined because of—the euphemism was soon accepted—The Calamity.

At the farm, no one showed any interest in Marie's experiences. At least, not until some months later. . . .

Note on sources

I HAVE studied Napoleon and his time intensively for more than twenty years. In consequence, all the conversations, though of necessity imaginary, are based on a knowledge of the characters and of their past experiences.

For the campaign itself I have studied the following major works: Thiers' volume in his classic history of the Consulate and Empire and Charras' work on the Battle of Waterloo, with its violently opposite view of Napoleon. To balance the opinions of these older writers I have used Volume XVI of the late M. Louis Madelin's great history of the period.

I have read the strategists, Grouard and Lenient. Grouard finds the strategy perfect, the tactics faulty, and the delays, attributed to Napoleon's poor health, the key to the disaster. Lenient condemns the strategy, finds the cause of defeat to be Napoleon's contempt for his own commanders and for his able opponents, Wellington and Blücher.

The principal Belgian historians are: first, Navez whose long study has, for chief aim, the rescuing of the Belgian troops from the charge of cowardice made against them by English eyewitnesses and later English historians, and secondly, Winard Aerts, the author of a fine, detailed and impartial account.

Of English authorities, Siborne's work, though more than a hundred years old, is still useful. Even more so is his collection of *Waterloo Letters* and the model of the battle-field which he constructed in 1830 and which is now in the United Services Museum. Then there are Chesney's Waterloo lectures, particularly useful for the practical working of the French messenger system, so perfect in theory. Evelyn Wood's *Cavalry in the Waterloo Campaign* was also of great use for the final phase of the battle and Dalton's *Waterloo Roll Call* for details of the Guards' officers killed or wounded.

Amongst many eyewitness accounts, Shaw Kennedy ranks first for accuracy, while Gronow, Leeke, Mercer, Kincaid and a score of others contribute interesting and often amusing sidelights.

The American, J. C. Ropes, gives valuable information on the instructions given to Grouchy and, able, by his nationality, to stand dispassionately aside, is another impartial writer. He condemns Ney more than Grouchy, who was the accepted scapegoat for the whole of the nineteenth century. Since then the pendulum has swung gradually towards a reasoned and reasonable explanation of his apparent incompetence. The short work by Ratcliffe, *Grouchy and the Guns of Waterloo*, demonstrates his inescapable difficulties of temperament and situation, and carries his rehabilitation a stage further.

Amongst French memoir writers, Fleury de Chaboulon, Marchand and Ali, all present at Le Caillou, are of great use.

Finally, for the hour-by-hour details, I have relied on Henri Houssaye's classic, *Waterloo*, and the recent brilliant and lucid study by Commandant Lachouque *Le Secret de Waterloo*. These two agree on all the main points of time and episode.

As the latest historian, Lachouque must have the last word on the result. He asks, rhetorically, in his Preface: 'Who won the Battle of Waterloo?' and answers 'Wellington.' 'And who lost it? Nobody.'

For the many details of the farm of Le Caillou, its inhabitants and its furniture, I am grateful to M. Theo Fleischmann's vivid and scholarly brochure, written for the Société Belge des Etudes Napoléoniennes. This, and my own visit to Le Caillou and the battle-field in 1954, gave me the original idea for this book.

